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SHAKESPEARE

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PROFESSOR AT [redacted]

TRANSLATED UNDER THE AUT[redacted]

BY

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

Without undervaluing in the least degree the laborious researches of those English critics who, by a careful collation of manuscripts, by archæological research, and historical investigation, have restored and illustrated the text of Shakespeare, it may be safely asserted that to Germany we owe, if not the founders, yet the most able and systematic among the disciples of that school of Shakespearian critics who have illustrated rather his thought than his language, his matter than his who have studied his writings rather as those o list, a thinker, a master of human nature, and all places and of all time, than as those of a writer of a certain epoch. The labours of wh not unfairly called the English school of Shak critics are invaluable, since without them the in which the moralist and the poet has spok have been often little understood, and to their the elucidation of many otherwise obscure pa owe much of our intelligent appreciation of the of the great dramatist. A higher place, howe be, perhaps, assigned to those who, with m qualified for the task, have devoted their attent illustration of those eternal truths enshrined in guage—truths which lie hidden to the commo

which, if they are to be comprehended in their full meaning, demand patient study and investigating perseverance.

Among the disciples of this latter school will be found the names of some English writers, such as Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, and others. Johnson also treated the poet in an ethical point of view, and if his work on the subject added little to his fame, it showed, as Macaulay remarks, how attentively he had during many years observed human life and human nature. But it is not my intention in these few prefatory words to enter into any detailed notice of the works upon Shakespeare which have appeared in England, America, France, and Germany. Each of these countries may reckon among its scholars men who have conscientiously studied the genius, the ethics, and the art of the great poet; and the labours of Hudson, Guizot, Schlegel, Goethe, Ulrici, and others have from time to time brought forth much valuable material, and have met with due appreciation.

The relation in which this work of Gervinus stands to these previous commentaries he has himself so fully pointed out in his Introduction that it is needless for me to enlarge upon it here. He has indeed so far followed in the steps of his predecessors in regarding his author not only as a poet and a dramatist, but as a moralist, and a master of human nature. But he has done more than this. Taking up the idea which Goethe only suggested in his criticism on Hamlet, he has pursued the course which the German poet indicated. He has perceived one ruling idea pervading every play, linking every part, every character, every episode, to one single aim. He has pointed out the binding thread in things which before seemed disconnected, and has found a justification for much that before seemed needlessly offensive and even

immoral. And in doing this, in thus weaving together materials apparently scattered, and in giving us a guiding thread through the intricacies of the plot, he has opened out to us a new source of interest, and has afforded a yet firmer basis to our former appreciation of the works of Shakespeare.

It is for this reason that he holds a distinguished place among the commentators on Shakespeare in his own country, and standing thus alone in the path he has taken, his work will be a welcome addition to English Literature. His 'History of German Poetry,' and his 'History of the Nineteenth Century,' have already given his name a world-wide reputation, and have placed him in the highest rank as a critic of art and as a philosophical historian.

It only remains for me to add that I have undertaken this work with the author's sanction and under his s vision. It has led me more and more deeply to a ciate the views it unfolds, and the personal adva and enjoyment I have derived from their conside will, I trust, be shared by many readers.

F. E. Bunn

October 1862.

PREFACE

OF

THE GERMAN AUTHOR.

THE delineation of the great British poet which I now publish sprung from a series of happy hours in which for many years I made Shakespeare's works a s of continual reflection, and drew the purest enj from their elucidation.

After the completion of my 'History of C Poetry,' I was desirous to return to my original the long-forsaken field of political history. My in was, and it still is, to follow up the conclusion historical record of our literature by venturing to take the history of our own time, to exhibit German people as in a mirror the picture of the to hold before them their dishonour, their vocati their hopes, and to point out to them 'the very body' of this period, a period which more an promises to become a great and important one, reward the trouble of the historical observer. have since corresponded to this expectation; th out to the historian a still more alluring task, an same time open to him a more instructive school.

have drawn me also for a while from my post of observation into the whirlpool of active life, into a labyrinth from which, although appearances may contradict it, there is for the present no prospect of a satisfactory and definitive issue.

Amid these agitations of political life, and amid investigations into the base motives of the historical world, I longed for some refuge for self-collectedness and composure, and felt the necessity of raising the soul above the low ground of reality. This necessity was not to be disregarded.

The recent period of our civilisation and history, affords sufficient explanation of the reason why we are wont in Germany to regard the fine arts and their productions as indispensable. The present, however, calls us, as it were, from these dear and cherished tendencies to the field of active life, which can be won by no half efforts, and which claims our united powers. Divided between these contending necessities, how may we satisfy both without doing damage to the one?

The demands of our country, the duties of the day, and the active vocations of life are uncompromising; these must first be satisfied, enjoyment and intellectual ease must accommodate themselves to them. But the enjoyments of the mind may themselves be of such a kind as to become a spur to our activity and efficiency of action, provided they are of a nature to keep our ideas healthy and not to over-refine the feelings, to engage the heart and imagination as well as the practical understanding, and to strengthen the will in its resolves. The works of the Muses which possess this property in a high degree are altogether few, but these few rank among the first and greatest.

In the intellectual history of England and Germany

there are two men, the one born in this, the other in that land, who maintained in these later centuries the old Teutonic kindred and fellowship, the possession of whom the two nations share, and for the higher appreciation of whom they mutually strive. The similar position which they occupied among the most practical and the most eminently intellectual people places 'these mediators between two nations' prominently in that middle position where they reconcile and unite contradictory qualities; and in this union lies a sure pledge of human greatness. A similar interesting picture is perhaps not again presented by the whole mental history of humanity. These men, therefore, and their relation to these two nations, have ever given me much to think of and admire; and they are drawn closer to me at the present time, when their works are especially suitable to our peculiar condition.

England has naturalised our Handel and numbered him amongst her own; in lasting tradition, and amid all the corruptions of prevailing tastes, she has cherished his pure melody and gratefully preserved his memory; she has gathered materials for his life, and collected his works in an edition worthy of them. To him, a Luther in overflowing fulness, in strong and vehement character, in Protestant-religious depth, in wide sway over the inner world of feeling, and in wonderful power of utterance, to him must we repair if we would flee away from the errors of the musical world in a dull and distracted age; for in him alone among musicians of later date can we understand what the ancients have said of the vigorous Doric art as a moral means of culture, and of its ennobling and strengthening influence upon the character and will of man. He has been, perhaps, more justly appreciated by the English; he has remained their national

favourite among musicians, although in natural and musical character no truer German could be found, and although his art is intrinsically interwoven with the history of our poetry and its highest qualities. But of this, perhaps, another time.

To the Shakespeare of England *we* gladly boast of having done still greater justice; certain it is that through industry and love, just as England did with our Handel, we have won the great poet for ourselves, though England has not suffered herself to be robbed of the poet in the same manner as we have been of the musician. With regard to intellectual enjoyment, which on that crossway between active and contemplative life can in itself afford us the highest satisfaction without enervating us for the duties of outward action, there is no richer source than this poet, who with the magic of imagination fascinates the enthusiastic mind of youth, and with the thoughtfulness and ripeness of his judgment offers inexhaustible food for the mature powers; who hardens and sharpens the spirit for actual and active life in its widest extent, raising it at the same time far above all barriers to the contemplation of eternal blessings; who teaches us at once to love and to disregard the world, to hold it under our control and to renounce it. With these qualities Shakespeare has robbed us of delight in much other poetry, but for all that we relinquish he indemnifies us a hundredfold. Even in our own great poets, our Goethe and Schiller, he has made us doubt; and it is well known that in a new school in Germany there prevails a belief in a future second German Shakespeare, who will found a greater dramatic art than the two poets we have named. Until he comes, until this belief has become active enough to displace Shakespeare, standing as we are on the threshold of a new political

life, and needing practical mental culture, it must, at all events, be rather advantageous than the reverse to maintain and extend this tendency of the public taste, and to attempt anew to naturalise the old Shakespeare among us more and more, even at the risk of casting our own poets still further in the shade. A similar benefit would it be to our intellectual life if his famed contemporary Bacon were revived in a suitable manner, in order to counterbalance the idealistic philosophy of Germany. For both these, the poet as well as the philosopher, having looked deeply into the history and politics of their people, stand upon the level ground of reality, notwithstanding the high art of the one and the speculative notions of the other. By the healthfulness of their own mind they influence the healthfulness of others, while in their most ideal and most abstract representations they aim at a preparation for life *as it is*; for *that* life which forms the exclusive subject of all political action. Our tame poetry, sometimes romantic and fantastic, sometimes homely and domestic, and our spiritualistic philosophy failed in this; and it behoves us to consider whether such can be the school qualified to prepare us for the vocation towards which we are striving so eagerly. In England, in the land of political supremacy, it would not be acknowledged as such. For *no* one will be so full of *delusion and folly* as to think that a poet and a philosopher thus qualified have been cast by chance among a people thus conditioned! *One* national spirit and the same practical hearty sense of life which has created this state and this popular freedom have also fashioned a poetry so full of life, and a philosophy so rich in experience. And the more decidedly *we* acquire and cultivate appreciation and delight in such productions of the mind, the more decidedly shall we ripen into a capacity

for fashioning our own active life into conformity with that which these migrated forefathers have exhibited to all the world for imitation.

This book is intended to lead to the study of the poet of whom it treats. Let it then be read, not cursorily nor in parts, but connectedly and as a whole, and always with the poet at hand. Much would otherwise remain obscure, much would appear fanciful, and much would seem to be imputed to the poet, whilst my simple endeavour has been to allow him as much as possible to explain himself. The results of my reflections, little strained as they are, will on some points offer nothing new, and on others will surprise many. Thus we need no longer prove to most readers the poetical beauty and the intellectual superiority of Shakespeare's works; on the other hand, the splendid moral grandeur of the poet has hitherto remained in many parts concealed to us by the externals of form and style. When first the veil that shrouds him is removed, we perceive, in this moral respect also, a greatness in this man which rivals every other point in him, but which will strike many persons as singular in this age, in which we are accustomed to consider mental greatness inseparable from free-thinking and immorality.

The critical severity of my literary judgments, and my discouraging reception of the poetical attempts of our day, have often met with reproof. It pleases me to have here an opportunity of showing that I can also praise and love. And if praise and love are more suitable than blame to strengthen and animate our struggling literature, then certainly must the picture which I here sketch apply the spur of emulation to every gifted soul. For the work is performed with persevering love, the

subject is chosen with exclusive love, and all extraneous accessories have been expressly kept aloof, in order to rivet the eye of the beholder upon the one object of admiration.

These reflections on the British poet are on the whole a necessary completion to my 'History of German Poetry.' For Shakespeare, from his diffusion and influence, has become a German poet almost more than any of our native writers. But apart from this influence of Shakespeare upon our own poetic culture, throughout my work upon German poetry my eye was steadily fixed upon the highest aims of all poetic art, and amongst them upon Shakespeare's writings. This made my verdicts severe, because, having before me this highest example, partial dissatisfaction, even at the greatest works of our first native poets, could not be wholly concealed. Perhaps many may now be more reconciled with those verdicts when the standard of measurement has been here made more apparent. Perhaps, too, from the radical difference of the two works, we may learn better to recognise the difference between the historical and æsthetic criticism of poetical productions.

The gain which I myself have derived from these considerations upon Shakespeare appears to me immeasurable. It may seem as if little that is original is accomplished by placing oneself merely as the judge and interpreter of another. But when this judgment is exercised upon a great man, whose art in its power and extent fathoms all things, whose own wisdom, moreover, does not lie before us as direct tradition, but requires an operation of the mind to purify it from the elements of poetic characterisation, then this occupation possesses all the benefits which can be afforded by a practical

knowledge and study of man, attempted by concentrating the mind on the worthiest subjects of reflection; its advantage as well as its enjoyment can scarcely be placed in comparison with that of any other work, and it arouses all the energy of the inner self-active life.

GERVINUS.

Heidelberg, 1849-50.

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INTRODUCTION

'It is a disgrace to England, that even now, 258 years after Shakspere's death, the study of him has been so narrow, and the criticism, however good, so devoted to the mere text and its illustration, and to studies of single plays, that no book by an Englishman exists which deals in any worthy manner with Shakspere as a whole, which tracks the rise and growth of his genius from the boyish romanticism or the sharp youngmanishness of his early plays, to the magnificence, the splendour, the divine intuition, which mark his ablest works. The profound and generous "Commentaries" of Gervinus—an honour to a German to have written, a pleasure to an Englishman to read—is still the only book known to me that comes near the true treatment and the dignity of its subject, or can be put into the hands of the student who wants to know the mind of Shakspere.'

These words were written by me in the autumn of 1873, when I founded 'The New Shakspere Society,' and have appeard in that Society's Prospectus up to this day. Their truth has been confirmd by all the best judges to whom I have spoken about Gervinus's 'Commentaries' since. One of the ablest of these, my friend Professor J. R. Seeley—a student of Shakspere from his youth—said, on returning the book to me, 'The play of *Cymbeline* had always puzzld me; and now, for the first time, Gervinus has explaind it. I could not have believd before, that any man could have taught me, at my time of life, so much about one of Shakspere's plays. It is all clear now.' In Germany Gervinus's book still holds its ground as the best æsthetic work on our great poet, and is respected by all thoughtful men.

My strong conviction of its value leads me, however unworthy for the task, to say now a few words of recommendation of the book to my English fellow-students of Shakspere, and to note, for the use of beginners, a few points that may help them in their work: 1. On Gervinus's book. 2. On the change in Shakspere's metre as he advanct in life,

[1] By F. J. Furnivall, Esq., M.A., Trin. Hall, Cambr., Founder and Director of the New Shakspere Society, the Chaucer Society, the Early English Text Society, &c.

and on 'Metrical Tests.' 3. On the spurious portions of plays calld Shakspere's, and the use of metrical tests in detecting them. 4. On noting the progressive changes in Shakspere's language, imagery, and thought. 5. On the succession of Shakspere's plays. 6. On the helps for studying them. I want just to tell a beginner now, what I wish another student had told me when I began to read Shakspere.

§ 1. Most Englishmen who read Shakspere are content to read his plays in any haphazard order, to enjoy and admire them—some greatly, some not much—without any thought of getting at the meaning of them, and at the man who lies beneath them; without any notion of tracing the growth of his mind, from its first upshoot till the ripening of its latest fruits. Yet this is not the way in which the works of SHAKSPERE, the chief glory of English literature, should be studid. Carefully and faithfully is every Englishman bound to follow the course of the most splendid imagination of his land, and to note its purpose in every mark it leaves of its march. Shakspere *must* be studied chronologically, and as a whole. In this task the student will get most real and welcome help from Professor Gervinus. The Professor starts with Shakspere's earliest poems, the *Venus and Adonis*, (full of passion and of Stratford country life), and *Lucrece*, (of which Chaucer's *Troylus* must surely have been the model); then reviews his life in London,—wild in its early days,—and the condition of the stage when Shakspere joind it; next, his earliest dramatic attempts, his touchings of *Titus Andronicus* (*Pericles* must be put later), and *Henry VI.*, Part I., and his recast of 2 and 3 *Henry VI.*; with his farces *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Then the works of his Second Period, in four divisions: 1. His erotic or love-pieces. 2. His historical plays. 3. His comedies of *The Merry Wives*, *As You Like It*, *Much Ado*, and *Twelfth Night*. 4. His Sonnets. Next, the Professor treats the great Third Period of Shakspere's Tragedies, headed by the tragi-comedy *Measure for Measure*, and winding-up with the purposeful and peaceful comedies of later age, *The Tempest* and *Winter's Tale*, and *Henry VIII*, which (says Mr. Spedding) Shakspere plannd, but wrote less than half of (1,166 lines), Fletcher writing the rest (1,761 lines).

Shakspere's course is thus shown to have run from the amorousness and fun of youth, through the strong patriotism of early manhood, to the wrestling with the dark problems that beset the man of middle age, to the time of gloom which weighd on Shakspere (as on so many men) in later life, when, though outwardly successful, the world seemd all against him, and his mind dwelt with sympathy on scenes of faithlessness of friends, treachery of relations and subjects, ingratitude of children, scorn of his kind; till at last, in his Stratford home again, peace came to him, Miranda and Perdita in their lovely freshness and charm greeted him, and he was laid by his quiet Avon's side.

In his last section, 'Shakespeare,' Gervinus sets before us his view of the poet and his works as a whole, and rightly claims for him the highest honour as the greatest dramatic artist, the rarest judge of men and human affairs, the noblest moral teacher, that Literature has yet known.

What strikes me most in Gervinus is his breadth of culture and view, his rightness and calmness of judgment, his fairness in looking at both sides of a question, his noble earnest purpose, his resolve to get at the deepest meaning of his author, and his reverence and love for Shakspere. No one can read his book without seeing evidence of a range of reading and study rare indeed among Englishmen. No one can fail to notice how his sound judgment at once puts the new [1] 'Affaire du Collier,'—the Perkins folio forgeries, &c.,—in its true light; how he rejects the ordinary biographer's temptation—to which so many English Shakspereans yield—of making his hero an angel; how he takes the plain and natural meaning of the 'Sonnets' as their real one, and yet shows us Shakspere rising from his vices to the height of a great teacher of men. No one can fail to see how Gervinus, noble-natured and earnest himself, is able to catch and echo for us the 'still small voice' of Shakspere's hidden meaning even in the lightest of his plays. No Englishman can fail to feel pleasure in the heartfelt tribute of love and praise that the great Historian of German Literature gives to the English Shakspere.

No doubt the book has shortcomings, if not faults. It is German, and occasionally cumbrous; it has not the fervour and glow, or the delicacy and subtlety, of many of Mrs. Jameson's Studies; it does not do justice to Shakspere's infinite humour and fun; it makes, sometimes, little odd mistakes.[2] But still it is a noble and generous

[1] The old forgeries printed by Mr. Collier as genuine were the documents from the Ellesmere (or Bridgwater House) and Dulwich College Libraries, a State Paper, and the latter additions to the Dulwich Letters (see Dr. Ingleby's *Complete View*). I, in common with many other men, have examind the originals with his prints of them. Mr. Collier printed one more name to one document than was in it when produc'd. See Mr. A. E. Brae's opinion at p. 13 of 'Collier, Coleridge, and Shakespeare: a Review, by the Author of "Literary Cookery,"' 1860. None of Mr. Collier's statements should be trusted till they have been verified. The entries of the actings of Shakspere's Plays in Mr. Peter Cunningham's 'Revels at Court' (Shakespeare Society, 1842), pp. 203–5, 210–11, are also printed from forgeries (which Sir T. Duffus Hardy has shown me), though Mr. Halliwell says he has a transcript of some of the entries, made before Mr. Cunningham was born. Thus the following usually relied-on dates are forgd: 1605, *Moor of Venis, Merry Wives, Measure for Measure, Errors, Love's Labours Lost, Henry V., Merchant of Venice.* 1612, *Tempest, Winter's Tale.*

[2] Professor Seeley notices three:—1. In the comment on 1 *Henry IV.* Gervinus takes as literal and serious (p. 309) Hotspur's humourous exaggeration of Mortimer's keeping him *nine hours* listening to devils' names:

> I tell you what:
> He held me last Night *at least nine howres*
> In reckning vp the seuerall Deuils Names
> That were his Lackeyes. (III. i. 155–8, *Folio*, p. 61, col. 1.)

book, which no true lover of Shakspere can read without gratitude and respect.

§ 2. Though Gervinus's criticism is mainly æsthetic,[1] yet, in settling the dates and relations of Shakspere's plays, he always shows a keen appreciation of the value of external evidence, and likewise of the metrical evidence, the markt changes of metre in Shakspere's verse as he advanct in life. As getting the right succession of Shakspere's plays is 'a condition precedent' to following the growth of his mind, and as 'metrical tests' are a great help to this end, though they have had, till lately, little attention given to them in England,[2] I wish to say a few words on them.

Admitting (as I contend we must admit) that *Love's Labours Lost* is Shakspere's earliest wholly-genuine play, and contrasting it with his latest, *The Tempest*, *Cymbeline*, and *Winter's Tale*, we find that—(I.), while in *Love's Labours Lost* the 5-measure ryming lines are 1,028, and the blank verse only 579; in *The Tempest* such ryming lines are 2, and the blank verse 1,458, while in the *Winter's Tale* there are no 5-measure ryming lines to 1,825 blank verse ones. Again, (II.) Shakspere's early blank verse was written on the model of ryming verse, nearly every line had a pause at the end; but as he wrote on, he struggld out of these fetters into a freer and more natural line, which

When Hotspur of course means ten or twelve minutes, or perhaps even five. Certainly poor evidence that Hotspur is patient when in repose, pliable and yielding like a lamb! 2. Gervinus (p. 310) misses the humour of Hotspur's speech to Kate his wife (II. iii. *Folio*, p. 55, col. 2):

> *Hot.* Come, wilt thou see me ride?
> And *when I am a horseback*, I will sweare
> I loue thee infinitely,

though he is right in saying Hotspur does love his wife, and that because he banters her. 3. He turns Desdemona's words into Othello's own (p. 517), 'She gave him a "world of sighs;" and she swore (even in remembrance *the Moor deemed it strange and wondrus pitiful*) that she wished she had not heard his story.' Whereas Shakspere says, I. iii. 159–162, *Folio*, p. 314, col. 1:

> She gaue me for my paines a world of [sighs]:
> She swore, in faith, 'twas strange, 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange,
> 'Twas pittifull, 'twas wondrous pittifull:
> She wish'd she had not heard it. . . .

Professor Dowden (who refers to the notice of Gervinus in vol. vi. of the Shakspere *Jahrbuch*) thinks that Gervinus often goes much astray, as in what he says of Mercutio; and that his strong historical tendency imports meanings into the plays which are not there, as when he calls Hamlet a culturd man in an age of rude force, whereas it's an age of Osric, Polonius, universities, &c. The inconsistency, such as it is, seems to me in the facts, and not in Gervinus.

[1] Mr. Halliwell complains of this word being stretcht to include 'psychological and philosophical.'

[2] Malone in 1778 pointed out the value of the Ryme-Test in settling the priority of one early play over another. He also noticed the unstopt or run-on line test, which the late Mr. Bathurst brought more markedly under the notice of modern folk by his little book (1857) on Shakspere's differences of versification.

often ran-on into the next, took the pause from the end, and put it in or near the middle of the line. Contrast these three extracts:—

LOVES LABOURS LOST, II. i. 13-34.
(*Folio*, p. 126, revised.)

Prin. Good Lord *Boyet*, my beauty, though but mean,
Needs not the painted flourish of your praise.
Beauty is bought by iudgement of the eye,
Not vttred by base sale of chapmens tongues.
I am lesse proud to heare you tell my worth,
Then you much willing to be counted wise,
In spending your wit in the praise of mine.
But now to taske the tasker: good *Boyet*,
You are not ignorant, all-telling fame
Doth noyse abroad, *Nauar* hath made a vow,
Till paineful studie shall outweare three yeares,
No woman may approach his silent Court:
Therefore, to's seemeth it a needfull course,
Before we enter his forbidden gates,
To know his pleasure, and, in that behalfe,
Bold of your worthinesse, we single you,
As our best mouing faire soliciter.
Tell him, the daughter of the King of France,
On serious businesse crauing quicke dispatch,
Importunes personall conference with his grace.
Haste; signifie so much; while we attend,
Like humble visag'd suters, his high will.

LEAR, IV. iii. 17-25.
(From the *Quarto* of 1608, sig. L 7, ed. Steevens; *Dyce*, vii. 318, revised.)

Kent. O then it mou'd her,
Gent. Not to a rage: patience and sorrow stroue
Who should expresse her goodliest. You have seene
Sun-shine and raine at once: her smiles and teares
Were like a better day: those happy smilets
That plaid on her ripe lip, seem'd not to know
What guests were in her eyes; which parted thence
As pearles from diamonds dropt. In briefe, sorrow
Would be a rarity most belou'd, if all
Could so become it.

THE WINTERS TALE, III. ii. 232-243.
(*Folio*, p. 288, col. 1.)

Leo. Thou didst speake but well
When most the truth: which I receyue much bet|ter
Then to be pittied of thee. Prethee, bring me 234
To the dead bodies of my Queene, and Sonne;
One graue shall be for both. Vpon them shall [237
The causes of their death appeare (vnto
Our shame perpetuall). Once a day Ile vis|it
The Chappell where they lye; and teares shed there
Shall be my recrea|tion. So long as Na|ture 240
Will beare vp with this exercise, so long
I dayly vow to vse it. Come and leade | me 242
To these sorrowes.

The dullest ear cannot fail to recognize the difference between the early *Love's Labours Lost* pause or dwelling on the end of each line, and the later *Lear's* and *Winter's Tale* disregard of it, with (III.) the following shift of the pause to or near the middle of the next line. In short, the proportion of run-on lines to end-pause ones in three of the earliest and three of the latest plays of Shakspere is as follows:—

Earliest Plays	Proportion of unstopt lines to end-stopt ones
Loues Labour's Lost	1 in 18·14
The Comedy of Errours	1 in 10·7
The Two Gentlemen of Verona	1 in 10

Latest Plays	Proportion of unstopt lines to end-stopt ones
The Tempest	1 in 3·02
Cymbeline King of Britaine	1 in 2·52
The Winter's Tale	1 in 2·12

Again, note that all the above *Love's Labours Lost* lines have only five measures, or ten syllables, each; and not one weak ending, that is, a final unemphatic word, or a word that clearly belongs to the next line, while in *The Winter's Tale* extract there are four lines with extra syllables (240 having one also before the central pause) and three with weak endings, 234, 237, 242. In these points contrast the *Love's Labours Lost* lines also with the two following passages, from *The Winter's Tale*, (Act II., sc. i., l. 158–170; Folio, p. 283), and Shakspere's part of *Henry VIII.*:—

Lord. I had rather you did lacke then I (my Lord)
Vpon this ground: and more it would content | me 159
To haue her Honor true, then your suspit|ion,
Be blam'd for't how you might.
Leo. Why, what neede we 161
Commune with you of this? but rather fol|low
Our forcefull instigation? Our prerog|ative
Cals not your Counsailes, but our naturall good|nesse
Imparts this: which, if you, or stupified,
Or seeming so, in skill, cannot or will | not
Rellish a truth, like vs, informe your selues;
We neede no more of your aduice: the mat|ter,
The losse, the gaine, the ord'ring on't, is all
Properly ours. (*Winter's Tale*, II. i. 158–170.)

Here (IV.) are seven lines with extra syllables,[1] and (V.) two lines, 159, 161, with 'weak-endings,' the coming of which in any number is a sure sign of Shakspere's late work (see the Postscript). Again, take, for the weak ending, *Henry VIII.*, Act III., sc. ii., l. 97–104; Folio, p. 220, col. 2:—

[1] Professor Hertzberg's table of the proportion of 11-syllable lines to all the others (12-syllable and short lines too) in the following 17 plays is given in the Introduction to his German translation of *Cymbeline*, as follows:—

	Per cent.		Per cent.
Love's Labour's Lost	4	As You Like It	18
Titus Andronicus	5	Troilus and Cressida	20
King John	6	All's Well	21
Richard II.	11·39	Othello	26
Errors	12	Winter's Tale	31·09
Merchant of Venice	15	Cymbeline	32
Two Gentlemen	15	Tempest	33
Shrew	16	Henry VIII.	44
Richard III.	18		

What though I know her ver|tuous
And well deseruing? Yet, I know her for 98
A spleeny Lutheran, and not wholsome to 99
Our cause, that she should lye i' th' bosome of 100
Our hard-rul'd King. Againe, there is sprung up
An Heretique, an Arch-one; *Cranmer*, one
Hath crawl'd into the fauour of the King,
And is his Oracle.

Three weak endings in three consecutive lines, 98–100; only one end-stopt line in 7; one with an extra syllable. These are notes of Shakspere's latest plays; indeed, his share in *Henry VIII.* was almost certainly his last work. Or take Mr. Spedding's beautiful instance from *Cymbeline*, Act IV., sc. ii., l. 220–4; Folio, p. 389, col. 1;—

Thou shalt not lacke
The Flower that's like thy face, Pale Primrose, nor 221
The azur'd Hare-bell, like thy Veines: no, nor 222
The leafe of Eglantine, whom not to slan|der
Out-sweetned not thy breath.

'I doubt whether you will find a single case in any of Shakspere's undoubtedly early plays of a line of the same structure. Where you find a line of ten syllables ending with a word of one syllable—that word not admitting either of emphasis or pause, but belonging to the next line, and forming part of its first word-group—you have a metrical effect of which Shakespeare grew fonder as he grew older; frequent in his latest period; up to the end of his middle period, so far as I can remember, unknown.' (Mr. Spedding's letter to me on his 'Pause-Test.' 'New Shakspere Soc.'s Trans.,' 1874, p. 31.) Professor W. A. Hertzberg counts seventy-two weak endings in the 2,407 (omitting the songs and other lyrical pieces) of *Cymbeline*, or 1 to 33·43, showing its very late date, 1611 (?) There are other metrical tests, of which (VI.) the abandonment of doggrel—used only in five plays, all early or earlyish—and (VII.) the use of 6-measure lines, are two. No one test can be trusted; all must be combind and considerd, and us'd as helps for the higher æsthetic criticism. Every student should work at these tests for himself.[1] As material that may help him in using the

[1] Don't turn your Shakspere into a mere arithmetic-book, and fancy you're a great critic because you add up a lot of rymes or end-stopt lines, and do a great many sums out of your poet. This is mere clerk's work; but it is needed to impress the facts of Shakspere's changes in metre on your mind, and to help others, as well as yourself, to data for settling the succession of the plays. Metrical tests are but one branch of the tree of criticism. Mr. Hales's seven tests for the growth of Shakspere's art and mind in his plays are: 1. External Evidence (entries in the Stationers' Registers, Diaries, &c.) 2. Historical Allusions in the Plays. 3. Changes of Metre. 4. Change of Language and Style; then, Development of Dramatic Art, as shown in 5. Power of Characterization, and 6. Dramatic Unity. 7. (the most important of all) Knowledge of Life (not only knowledge of its facts, but a growth of moral insight, and of belief in moral laws ruling men, and the course of world). See my report of his two Lectures on Shakspere in *The Academy*, Jan. 17, 1874, p. 63; Jan. 31, p. 117.

ryme-test, I reprint from the 'New Sh. Soc.'s Trans.,' 1874, p. 16, Mr. Fleay's 'Metrical Table of Shakespeare's Plays,' though the order of the plays is not rightly given in it—has been since largely alterd by its compiler—and though it has not been verifi'd by any other counter:—

METRICAL TABLE OF SHAKSPERE'S PLAYS.

PLAY.	TOTAL OF LINES.	PROSE.	BLANK.	RHYMES, 5 MEASURES.	RHYMES, SHORT LINES.	SONGS.	DOUBLE ENDINGS.	ALTERNATES.	SONNETS.	DOGGEREL.	1 MEASURE.	2 MEASURES.	3 MEASURES.	4 MEASURES.	6 MEASURES.
I. PLAYS OF FIRST (RHYMING) PERIOD.															
Love's L. Lost.	2789	1086	579	1028	54	32	9	236	71	194	4	12	13	—	1
Midsum. N. D.	2251	441	878	781	138	63	29	158	—	—	—	5	3	—	—
Com. of Errors.	1770	240	1150	380	—	—	137	64	—	109	3	8	9	—	—
Rom. and Jul.	3002	405	2111	486	—	—	118	62	28	—	10	20	16	4?	6
Richard II.	2644	—	2107	537	—	—	148	12	—	—	11	17	26	22	33?
II. HISTORIES OF SECOND PERIOD.															
Richard III.	3599	55?	3374	170	—	—	570	—	—	—	20	39	13	23	16
King John.	2553	—	2403	150	—	—	54	12	—	—	1	9	4	4	2
1 Henry IV.	3170	1464	1622	84	—	—	60	4	—	—	16	17	16	16	13
2 Henry IV.	3437	1860	1417	74	7	15	203	[Pistol 64 l.]			3	13	7	—	6
Henry V.	3320	1531	1678	101	2	8	291	[Pist. 157 l.]	14	—	2	13	10	4	23
III. COMEDIES OF SECOND PERIOD.															
T. Gent. of V.	2060	409	1510	116	—	15	203	16	—	18	8	15	32	8	5
Mer. of Ven.	2705	673	1896	93	34	9	297	4	—	4	8	16	22	2	14
Twelf. Night.	2684	1741	763	120	—	60	152	—	—	—	8	21	23	5	10
As you Like it.	2804	1681	925	71	130	97	211	10	—	2	8	10	33	1	5
Merry Wives.	3018	2703	227	69	—	19	32	[Pistol 39 l.]			—	3	3	—	3
Much Ado, &c.	2823	2106	643	40	18	16	129	22	—	—	2	7	15	4	4
IV. COMEDIES OF THIRD PERIOD.															
All's Well.	2981	1453	1234	280	2	12	223	8	14	—	7	31	31	5	14
Meas. for Me.	2809	1134	1574	73	22	6	338	—	—	—	10	29	66	5	47
V. TRAGEDIES OF THIRD PERIOD.															
Troylus and C.	3423	1186	2025	196	—	16	441	—	—	—	10	46	62	13	43
Macbeth.	1993	158	1588	118	129	—	399	—	—	—	8	28	43	8	18
Cymbeline.	3448	638	2585	107	—	32	726	[84 l. in vision]			8	15	31	18	42
Hamlet.	3924	1208	2490	81	—	60	508	[86 l. in play]			20	53	55	11	47
Othello.	3324	541	2672	86	—	25	646	—	—	—	19	66	71	13	78
King Lear.	3298	903	2238	74	—	83	567	—	—	—	18	34	116	22	50
VI. PLAYS OF FOURTH PERIOD.															
Julius Cæsar.	2440	165	2241	34	—	—	369	—	—	—	14	31	55	6	16
Coriolanus.	3392	829	2521	42	—	—	708	—	—	—	8	33	76	19	42
Antony and C.	3964	255	2761	42	—	6	613	—	—	—	14	38	84	31	61
Tempest.	2068	458	1458	2	—	96	476	[54 l. in masq.]			2	16	47	5	11
Winter's Tale.	2758	844	1825	0	—	57	639	[32 l. in chor.]			8	14	19	13	16
VII. PLAYS IN WHICH SHAKSPERE WAS NOT SOLE AUTHOR															
Henry VIII.	2754	67?	2613	16	—	12	1195	[46 l. in Prol.			2	19	18	3	32
Two Noble K.	2734	179	2468	54	—	33	1079	& Epilogue].			9	19	46	17	5
Pericles.	2386	418	1436	225	89	—	120	[222 l. Gower].			17	49	59	26	18
Timon of A.	2358	596	1560	184	18	—	257	—	—	—	15	28	54	30	37
VIII. FIRST SKETCHES IN EARLY QUARTOS.															
Rom. and Jul.	2066	261	1451	354	—	—	92	28	—	—	7	26	50	21	9
Hamlet.	2068	509	1462	54	43	—	209	[36 l. in play]			13	45	76	37	3
Henry V.	1672	898	774	30	—	—	104	—	—	—	1	25	35	31	1
Merry Wives.	1395	1207	148	40	38	[fairies]	19	—	—	—	—	1	—	5	4
IX. DOUBTFUL PLAYS.															
T. of Shrew.	2671	516	1971	169	15	—	260	—	—	49	4	18	22	23	8
Titus Andron.	2525	43	2338	144	—	—	154	—	—	—	4	8	9	9	1
1 Henry VI.	2693	—	2379	314	—	—	140	—	—	—	5	5	4	7	1
2 Henry VI.	3032	448	2562	122	—	—	255	—	—	—	8	25	15	21	1
3 Henry VI.	2904	—	2749	155	—	—	346	—	—	—	13	11	14	11	1
Contention.	1952	381	1571	44	—	—	54	—	—	—	—	14	16	32	4
True Tragedy.	2101	—	2035	66	—	—	148	—	—	—	14	21	29	38	8

That the ryme-test fails to place Shakspere's Plays in their right order, I have shown on pages 32–5 of the 'New Sh. Soc.'s Trans.' 1874; but its value, in combination with other tests, is great. Prof. Ingram has tabulated the results of his search with the weak-ending test, so valuable for Shakspere's late plays, and it will be given in my Post-script, p. xlix.

§ 3. Besides helping in settling the order of Shakspere's plays, metrical tests give important aid in—1, suggesting, by their differing proportions in different acts, possibly different dates for portions of his genuine plays; and 2, different authors in doubtful plays, and drawing definite lines between spurious and genuine work; but these tests must never be allowd to override the higher criticism: that must be judge. To take point 2 first. In his undergraduate days at Cambridge (1829–33) Mr. Tennyson pointed out—to Mr. Hallam, among others, who unwisely pooh-poohd the notion — that Fletcher's hand was largely in *Henry VIII.* Later, his friend Mr. James Spedding (the learned and able editor of 'Bacon's Works,' &c.) publisht his working-out of Mr. Tennyson's hint, in an analysis of the play, in 'The Gentleman's Magazine' for August 1850. Mr. Spedding first showd,—by their having markedly the characteristics of Shakspere's style, and the rest of the play not having these 'notes' of authorship, but having other 'notes' of Fletcher's hand,—that the scenes below markt Shakspere were his, and those marked Fletcher his.[1] Mr. Spedding then applied the extra-syllable (or feminine-ending) test, and I (in 1873) the end-stopt-line test, with the following result:—

Act	Scene	Lines	Extra Syll.	Proportion.	Author	Unstopt line.
I.	1	225	63	1 to 3·5	Shakspere	1 to 1·83
	2	215	74	„ 2·9	„	„ 1·86
	3&4	172	100	„ 1·7	Fletcher	„ 3·84
II.	1	164	97	„ 1·6	„	„ 2·96
	2	129	77	„ 1·6	„	„ 3·43
	3	107	41	„ 2·6	Shakspere	„ 2·37
	4	230	72	„ 3·1	„	„ 2·13
III.	1	166	119	„ 1·3	Fletcher	„ 4·83
	*2	193	62	„ 3·	Shakspere	„ 2·
	3	257	152	„ 1·6	Fletcher	„ 3·43
IV.	1	116	57	„ 2·	„	„ 3·
	2	80	51	„ 1·5	„	„ 4·55
	3	93	51	„ 1·8	„	
	1	176	68	„ 2·5	Shakspere	„ 2·28
V.	2	217	115	„ 1·8	Fletcher	„ 4·77
	3	(almost all prose or rough verse)			„	„ 5·01
	4	37	44	„ 1·6	„	„ 6·41

* To exit of the King. The rest of it. is made iii.

In short, the proportion of Shakspere's double endings,[2] was 1 to

[1] Mr. S. Hickson had arrivd before, privately and independently, at the same result. See Prof. Ingram's confirmation on p. xlix. *n.* below.

[2] Calld also extra syllables, or feminine endings. Very rarely in Shakspere,

3, of Fletcher's 1 to 1·7; of Shakspere's unstopt lines, 1 to 2·03, of Fletcher's 1 to 3·79, both tests making Shakspere's part of the play his latest work. Mr. Spedding's division of the play between Shakspere and Fletcher was confirmd independently by the late Mr. S. Hickson, in 'Notes and Queries,' ii. 198, Aug. 24, 1850; and by Mr. Fleay in 'New Sh. Soc. Trans.,' 1874, Appendix, p. 23.* It may be lookt on as certain. Again, Mr. Tennyson us't in his undergraduate days to read the genuine parts of *Pericles* to his friends in college. He read them to me in London last December (1873). He pickt them out by his ear and his knowledge of Shakspere's hand. Last April Mr. Fleay sent me, as genuine, the same parts of *Pericles*, got at mainly by working metrical tests. Sidney Walker, Gervinus (nearly), Delius and others, had before attaind the same result. Shakspere wrote the *Marina* story in Acts iii. iv. v., less the brothel scenes and the Gower choruses. These, Rowley wrote, says Mr. Fleay, while G. Wilkins wrote Acts i. and ii. and arrangd the play. ('New Sh. Soc. Trans.,' 1874, p. 195, &c.) Further, the late Mr. Samuel Hickson, in the 'Westminster and Foreign Quarterly' for April 1847, and working after Mr. Spalding and other critics,[1] restord to Shakspere his portion of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, which was not publisht till 1634, as 'Written by the memorable worthies of the time: Mr. John Fletcher, and Mr. William Shakspeare, Gent.' Mr. Hickson workt on æsthetic grounds, and showd that Shakspere designd the underplot as well as the main plot of the play, and wrote Acts I.; II. i.; III. i. ii.; IV. iii. (prose); V. all but scene ii. The rest Fletcher wrote, as is shown by its weakness when compard with Shakspere's part, and its more frequent use of the extra final syllable. Mr. Hickson's division of the play has been confirmd by the double-ending test and the end-stopt line test, which show that while in the 1,124 Shakspere-lines in the play there are 321 with extra final syllables or double endings, that is, 1 in 3·5, and only 1 line of 4-measures, in the 1,398 Fletcher-lines there are 771 with double endings, or 1 in 1·8, nearly twice as many as in Shakspere, and 14 lines of 4-measures. Also in Shakspere's lines the proportion of unstopt lines to end-stopt ones is 1 in 2·41, while in Fletcher's it is 1 in 5·53. See 'Appendix to New Sh. Soc. Trans.,' 1874, where Mr. Spedding's and Mr. Hickson's Papers are reprinted.

Again, the spurious parts of *Timon of Athens* had been more or less completely pointed out by Charles Knight and others. By metrical tests, with some slight help on æsthetic grounds from me, Mr. Fleay has, as I believe, rightly separated the genuine part of the play

more frequently in Fletcher, the last syllable is dwelt on:—'Up with a course or two, and tack about, boys.' *Two Noble Kinsmen*, Fletcher, III., v. 10 (see also II., ii., 63, 68, 71, 73).

[1] Mr. Tennyson always held that Shakspere wrote much of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. So did Coleridge, Charles Lamb, and De Quincey. See page l, below.

from the spurious, except in one instance, and printed it in the 'New Sh. Soc.'s Trans.,' 1874, p. 153–194. Once more, Farmer nearly 100 years ago said that Shakspere wrote only the Petruchio scenes in the *Taming of the Shrew*. Mr. Collier hesitatingly adopted this view. Mr. Grant White develop it, and I (and Mr. Fleay afterwards) turnd it into figures, making the following parts Shakspere's, though in many places they are workt up by him from the old *Taming of* a *Shrew*:—Induction; Act II., sc. i., l. 168–326 (? touching 115–167); III. ii. 1–125, 151–240; IV. i. (and ii. Dyce); IV. iii. v. (IV. iv. vi. Dyce); V. ii., 1–180; in short, the parts of Katharine and Petruchio, and almost all Grumio, with the characters on the stage with them, and possible occasional touches elsewhere. ('New Sh. Soc. Trans.' 1874, 103–110.) The rest is by the alterer and adapter of the old *A Shrew*, probably Marlowe, as there are deliberate copies or plagiarisms of him in ten passages (G. White).

The Cambridge editors, Messrs. Clark and Wright, have lately opend an attack, in their Clarendon-Press edition, on the genuineness of certain parts of *Macbeth*, and the attack has been inconsiderately develop by Mr. Fleay[1] in the 'New Sh. Soc.'s Trans.,' 1874. So far as the assault is on the Porter's speech, it seems to me a complete failure;[2] and the notion that a fourth-rate writer like Middleton could have written the grim and pregnant humour of that Porter's speech, I look on as a mere idle fancy. Mr. Hales thinks that the change to the trochaic metre in Hecate's speeches, and their inferior quality, point to a different hand, perhaps Middleton's;[3] but that is all of the play that he or I (who still hesitate[4]) can yet surrender. The wonderful pace at which the play was plainly written—a feverish haste drives it on—will account for many weaknesses in detail. The (probably) after-inserted King's-evil lines are manifestly Shakspere's. Mr. Fleay's late attack on the

[1] See Mr. Hales's excellent Paper on 'The Porter in *Macbeth*' in *The New Sh. Soc. Trans.*, 1874. Also De Quincey on the Knocking, *Works*, xiii. 192–8; Furness's *Macbeth*, p. 437.

[2] P.S.—Mr. Fleay's attack on the Porter's speech is now withdrawn. His attempt to make spurious the last three acts of *The Two Gentlemen* has also been wisely withdrawn. His theories, when not confirming former results, should be lookt on with the utmost suspicion.

[3] Middleton is selected, because in his *Witch* (p. 401–2 Furness's *Macbeth*) is a song 'Come away, come away,' which Davenant (who professt to be Shakspere's son by an inn-keeper's wife) inserted in *his* version of Shakspere's *Macbeth* (p. 337, Furness) at the point (III. v. 33) where Shakspere or his editors put *Come away, come away*, in the Folio. Also at the Folio's '*Musicke and a Song. Blacke Spirits*,' IV. i. 43, Davenant inserts Middleton's song 'Black spirits and white, red spirits and gray' (p. 404, p. 339, Furness), with variations.

[4] Compare with the stilted Witch speeches Lucianus's charm-lines in *Hamlet*, III. ii. 266–271. (Consider whether Hamlet's speech for the players of a dozen or sixteen lines (II. ii. 566, III. ii. 1, 86) is III. ii. 197–223, or is never deliverd, as his own excited utterance (III. ii. 272–5), and the King's remorseful rising (276) bring on the crisis which the speech was perhaps intended (III. ii. 86) to provoke. See Prof. Seeley and Mr. Malleson hereon, in *N. Sh. Soc. Trans.*, Pt. 2 or 3.

genuineness of parts of *Julius Cæsar* ('New Sh. Soc. Trans.,' 1874, Part 2.) is so groundless, weak and vague, as hardly to deserve mention.

Richard III. has yet to be dealt with. The continuous strain of the women's speeches, and the monotonous 5-measure end-stopt line, have been thought by some to point to a second hand in the play, probably Marlowe's. But Mr. Spedding is strongly opposd to this view.

In 1 *Henry VI.* every reader, will, I apprehend, see, like Gervinus (p. 101), three hands, though all may not agree in the parts of the play they assign to those hands. Reading it independently, though hastily, before I knew other folks' notions about it, I could not recognize Shakspere's hand till II. iv., the Temple-Garden scene [1] (as Hallam notes). Whether Shakspere wrote more than II. iv., IV. ii.; [2] perhaps IV. i. iv. 12–46; possibly IV. v., I have not had time to work out: but a new rymmg man seems to me to begin in IV. vi. vii.; and the first hand seems to write V. ii. iv.,[3] if not all V.

For the argument that Marlowe, Peele, and Greene, wrote *The Contention* and *True Tragedy*,—the foundations of the 2nd and 3rd Parts of *Henry VI.*,—Malone's essay should be consulted. (Variorum ed. of 1821, vol. xviii., p. 555.) On the other side, for the fallacious argument (from the unity of historical view, &c.) that Shakspere wrote all the Three Parts of *Henry VI.*, as well as *The Contention* and *True Tragedy*, Charles Knight's essay in his 'Pictorial Shakspere' (Histories, vol. ii., Library ed. vol. vii.) should be read. For the argument from style, that in lifting or altering 1,479 lines from *The Contention* for

[1] This scene has a very large proportion of extra-syllable lines; 30 in 134, or 1 in 4·46. It has 6 run-on lines, or 1 in 22·33. II. ii. 1–15 *may* have a touch of Shakspere, but are probably Marlowe.

[2] Compare I. 28, *Folio*, p. 111, col. 2 :—

> 'Ten thousand French *haue tane the Sacrament*
> To ryue their dangerous Artillerie
> Vpon no Christian soule but English Talbot.'

with *Ric. II.*, V. ii. 17, *Folio*, p. 42, col. 2 :—

> 'A dozen of them heere *haue tane the Sacrament.*
> To kill the King at Oxford.'

[3] Mr. Grant White 'ventures to express the opinion that the greater part of the First Part of *King Henry the Sixth* was originally written by Greene, whose style of thought and versification may be detected throughout the play, beneath the thin embellishment with which it was disguised by Shakespere, and especially in the first and second Scenes of the first Act; that traces of Marlowe's furious pen may be discovered in the second and third scenes of Act II.; and I should be inclined to attribute the couplets of the fifth, sixth, and seventh Scenes of Act IV. to Peele (for their pathos is quite like his in motive, and it must be remembered that Shakespeare has retouched them), were it not that Peele could hardly have written so many distichs without falling once into a peculiarity of rhyme which constantly occurs in his works, and which consists in making an accented syllable rhyme with one that is unaccented.' (Cp. róyal, withál; agó, ráinbow; way, Ída; deny, attórney, &c., in 'The Arraignment of Paris.')

Henry VI., Part 2; and 1,931 lines from *True Tragedy* for *Henry VI.*, Part 3, Shakspere was but transferring (but with few exceptions) his own early work to his later recast of these plays, see Mr. R. Grant White's very able essay in his New York edition of Shakspere, vol. vii., p. 403, &c.[1] Mr. Grant White's view has just been confirmd by Mr. Rives's Essay on *Henry VI.* (Bell, 2*s.*). But one can hardly believe that all the present 2 and 3 *Henry VI.* is Shakspere's, however early one may suppose him to have written it. To 2 *Henry VI.* he added 1,551 fresh lines, to 3 *Henry VI.* 973 fresh lines. The lifted lines are distinguisht by the absence of inverted commas in the text of Malone, and in the editions printed from his, of which G. Bell and Sons' small-type 3*s.* 6*d.* book in Bohn's series is one. The lines markt with 'a single inverted comma' were, as Malone thought, retoucht and greatly improvd by Shakspere; while those markt by 'double inverted commas' were his own original production. It is a very great pity that later editors have not followd this most instructive arrangement. To its want, when reading the play, my own indecision about the authorship is due. The New Shakspere Society will no doubt soon publish a parallel-text edition of 2 *and* 3 *Henry VI.*, and *The Contention* and *True Tragedy*.

Titus Andronicus one would only be too glad to turn out of Shakspere's plays, so repulsive are its subject and the treatment of it. But the external evidence is too strong for us.[2] He no doubt retoucht it; and Mr. H. B. Wheatley has collected in the 'New Sh. Soc.'s Trans.,' 1874, p. 126–9, the passages in which he thinks he sees Shakspere's hand. See, too, Gervinus, p. 102–6, below.

Lastly, Mr. R. Simpson and myself feeling—as must often have been felt before—that Act II. of *King Edward III.* (Tauchnitz 'Five Doubtful Plays of William Shakespeare, 1869,' 1*s.* 10*d.*), the King's making love to the Countess of Salisbury, was either Shakspere's, or worthy of him in his early manhood, askt Mr. Fleay to examine the

[1] Mr. R. Grant White's 'opinion is, that the First Part of *The Contention*, *The True Tragedy*, and probably an early form of the First Part of *King Henry the Sixth*, unknown to us, were written by Marlowe, Greene, and Shakespeare (and perhaps Peele) together . . . . soon after the arrival of Shakespeare in London; and that he, in taking passages, and sometimes whole Scenes, from those plays for his *King Henry the Sixth* did little more than to 'reclaim his own' (vii. 407). 'We find, then, that . . . . Shakespeare retained 2,299 lines of the old version in the new, that he wrote 2,524 lines especially for the new version, and that 1,111 lines of the new version are alterations or expansions of passages in the old. That is, more than three-fourths of the Second and Third Parts of *King Henry the Sixth* may be regarded—with slight allowance for unobliterated traces of his co-laborers—as Shakespeare's own in every sense of the word; and to the remainder he probably has as good a claim as to many passages which he found in prose in various authors, and which were transmuted into poetry in their passage through the magical alembic of his brain.'—R. Grant White, *Shakespeare's Works*, vii. 462.

[2] In the Preface to *Titus* in my big Folio edition you will find a new theory on this subject.—J. O. (Halliwell) Phillipps.

play. He added to it the two pages from the entry of the King in Act I. sc. ii., and then said that in this King-Countess Episode the proportion of ryme-lines to verse-lines is 1 to 7; in the other parts of the play, 1 to 20; in the episode the proportion of lines with double endings (extra syllables or feminine endings) to regular 5-measure lines is 1 to 10; in the rest of the play it is 1 to 25. As the episode contains 'expressions like *hugy*, *vasture*, &c., which are either of frequent occurrence in Shakspere, or have the true ring of his coinage in them'; as it introduces 'two new characters' (Derby and Audley) who 'are afterwards developt after a totally different fashion,' and a third, 'Lodowick, the King's poet-secretary,' who is confind to the episode only, he concluded that Shakspere did write this episode ('Academy,' April 25, 1874, p. 462). The question of Shakspere's having taken any part in the other 'doubtful plays' formerly assignd to him, needs further investigation.

We must now hark back to point 1 (p. xxvii.), the help that metrical tests give in suggesting or confirming different dates for different periods of a play. This is a question to be approacht with very great caution, and one on which trust in one test may lead to ridiculous absurdities. We have as yet no comparative tables of the differences of metrical peculiarities in the different acts and scenes of Shakspere's plays, nor do we know whether any working test could be got from them if we had. But we do know that Shakspere retoucht and enlargd certain plays, and we are bound to see whether we can recognize in them his later work. *Love's Labours Lost*, for instance, which we feel sure — from its excessive word-play, its prevalence of ryme and end-stopt lines, its large use of doggrel, its want of dramatic development (it is a play of conversation and situation), its faint characterisation, &c. — must have been written quite early, say before 1590, is stated by the Quarto of 1598 (the earliest known) to have been 'Newly corrected and augmented.'[1] So with *All's Well*—

[1] I believe that Berowne's last speech in Act III., at least his lines 305–8 in IV. iii., and possibly V. ii. 315–334 (though more in the earlier style) are later insertions. Dyce says on IV. iii. 299–304 (Globe), 312–319 (as compard with 320, &c.), 'Nothing can be plainer than that in this speech we have two passages, both in their original and in their altered shape, the compositor having confounded the new matter with the old.' Mr. Spedding wrote thus on Saturday, Feb. 2, 1839: 'Finished *Love's Labour's Lost*. Observe the inequality in the length of the Acts; the first being half as long again, the fourth twice as long, the fifth three times as long, as the second and third. This is a hint where to look for the principal additions and alterations.' In the first Act I suspect Biron's remonstrance against the vow (to begin with) to be an insertion. In the fourth, nearly the whole of the close, from Biron's burst "Who sees the heavenly Rosaline" (IV. iii. 221). In the fifth, the whole of the first scene between Holofernes and Sir Nathaniel bears traces, to me, of the maturer hand, and may have been inserted bodily. The whole close of the fifth Act, from the entrance of Mercade (V. ii. 723), has been probably rewritten, and may bear the same relation to the original

possibly,[1] the recast of *Loues Labours Wonne* (Meres),—*The Merchant of Venice* (in which I agree with Mr. Hales that the casket scenes at least are earlier work), perhaps *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and other plays. And we are bound to search and see whether we can detect any of these augmentations—if not corrections—by their fuller thought and riper style. Study of the parallel-text Quartos will largely help in this.

In the case of *Troilus and Cressida*, as Mr. Alexander J. Ellis (our great authority on Early English and Shaksperean Pronunciation and Metre) said to me, there are clearly three stories: 1. Of Troylus and Cressida. 2. Of Hector. 3. Of Ajax, Ulysses, and the Greek Camp[2]—of which he car'd only to read the third, so far was it above the other two. The point must have been notict often before. To the parts of the play dealing with these three stories, Mr. Fleay has applied the ryme-test, with the following result ('New Sh. Soc. Trans.,' 1874, p. 2), pointing to three different dates for the different parts of the play. That there are two, an early, and a late, I do not doubt; the three dates I do doubt:—

Troylus story	Hector story	Ajax story	
72	50	16	Rhyme lines
607	798	873	Verse lines
1 : 8·4	1 : 13·6	1 : 54·5	ratio

Discussions of the Parliament Scene in *Richard II.*, *All's Well*, *The*

copy which Rosaline's speech "Oft have I heard of you, my Lord Biron," &c. (V. ii. 851–864) bears to the original speech of six lines (827–832), which has been allowed by mistake to stand. There are also a few lines (1–3) at the opening of the fourth Act which I have no doubt were introduced in the corrected copy.

Prince. Was that the king, that spurr'd his horse so hard
Against the steep uprising of the hill?
Boget. I know not; but I think it was not he.

It was thus that Shakspere learnt to *shade off* his scenes, to carry the action beyond the stage. Thus, in *Romeo and Juliet*, I. ii., old Capulet and Paris enter talking:—

But Montague is bound as well as I
In penalty alike, &c.

which was introduced in the amended copy.'

[1] Professors Delius, Hertzberg (who has specially gone into the point), Ingram and Dowden hold that the style, verse, and plot all belong to one period. Craik's and Hertzberg's view that *Love's Labours Wonne* is *The Taming of the Shrew* cannot be supported in the face of the original *Taming of* (*A*) *Shrew*.

[2] The Troylus story is in I. i. 1–107, ii. 1–321; II. i. 160, ii., iii. 1–33; IV. i., ii., iii., iv. 1–141, v. 12–53; *IV. v. 277–293; *V. i. 89–93, ii., iii. 97–115, iv. 20–24, v. 1–5, vi. 1–11. (*In all the Act V. scenes, and in IV. v. 277–293, Ulysses or Diomed comes in; the stories overlap.) The Hector story is in I. i. 108–119, iii. 213–309; II. ii.; III. i. 161–172; IV. iv. 142–150, v. 1–11, 64–276; *V. i., iii. 1–97, v., &c. to the end (except sc. vii. viii. ix., and epilogue, probably spurious). —Fleay. Dyce says, 'That some portions of it, particularly towards the end, are from the pen of a very inferior dramatist, is unquestionable; and they belong . . . perhaps to the joint production of Dekker and Chettle,' mentioned in Henslowe's *Diary*, p. 147, &c., ed. Shakespeare Soc.

Two Gentlemen (very feeble, as I think), and *Twelfth Night*, are also contained in Mr. Fleay's paper.

§ 4. As Shakspere's change of metre was but one of the signs of the growth of his art and power, the student must watch for all further manifestations of that growth in the poet's work; daring use of words, crowding new and fuller meanings into them, so as often to produce obscurity (specially in *Macbeth* and *Lear*[1]); change from fancy to imagination in figures of speech; increase in power of making his characters live, so that they become real men and women to you; deepening of purpose; heightening of tone; broadening of view; the insight growing greater as the art became perfect. To this end, registers should be made of all peculiar phrases, happy uses of words, and striking metaphors in the plays, as successively read; the parallel-texts of the first and second Quartos of *Romeo and Juliet* (now in the press for the New Sh. Soc., edited by Mr. P. A. Daniel), of *Hamlet* (edited by Josiah Allen, with preface by Samuel Timmins; Sampson Low, 1860), and other plays, when publisht, should be compard. Shakspere's treatment of the same thought or subject at different periods of his life should also be compard; take, for instance, the pretty impatience of Juliet to get news of Romeo out of her nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*; of Rosalind to get news of her lover, Orlando, out of Celia, in the later *As You Like It*; and of Imogen to get tidings of her husband, Posthumus, out of Pisanio, in the still later *Cymbeline*, III., ii. Again, the separation in storm and shipwreck of the family of Ægeon, and the re-union of father, child, and mother in the early *Comedy of Errors*, should be compard with the nearly-like re-union, if not separation, in the much later *Pericles*, &c. For incidents, take Mr. Spedding's happy instance of Shakspere's treatment of the face of a beautiful woman just dead:

1. *Romeo and Juliet*, second edition (1599), not in the first edition, therefore presumably written between 1597 and 1599:—

> Her blood is settled, and her joints are stiff.
> Life and these lips have long been separated.
> *Death lies on her, like an untimely frost*
> *Upon the fairest flower of all the field.*

2. 'Antony and Cleopatra' (1608, according to Delius, &c.):—

> If they had swallow'd poison, 'twould appear
> By external swelling; *but she looks like sleep,*
> *As she would catch another Anthony*
> *In her strong toil of grace.*

3. 'Cymbeline' (date disputed, but *I* say one of the latest [? 1611] plays):—

> How found you him? [Imogen disguisd as a youth.]
> Stark, as you see,
> *Thus smiling, as some fly had tickled slumber,*
> *Not as death's dart being laughd at.* His right cheek
> Reposing on a cushion.

[1] Mr. Hales, in *Academy*, Jan. 17, 1874, p. 63, col. 3.

SHAKESPEARE COMMENTARIES

'Subjects on which I should find it difficult not to say too much, though certain, after all, that I should still leave the better part unsaid, and the gleaning for others richer than my own harvest' COLERIDGE

'The difference in the treatment in these three cases represents the progress of a great change in manner and taste: a change which could not be put on or off like the fashion, but was part of the man' ('New Sh. Soc.'s Trans.,' 1874, p. 30). Beautiful as the tender pathos of the first image, Fancy-bred, is, we must yet feel that in the second and third the Imagination of the poet dwells no longer on the outside, but goes to the very heart of the matter. Cleopatra is shown in the deepest desire of her life; Imogen in her purity smiling unconsciously at death.[1]

Of stage situations and business, Shakspere started with a perfect mastery: his first two plays, *Love's Labours Lost* and *Errors*, prove

[1] Compare, in Mr. Ruskin's chapter "Of Imagination Penetrative," 'Modern Painters,' Vol. II., Part II., § 2, Chap. III., p. 158, ed. 1848, his instance of lips described by Fancy, dwelling on the outside, and Imagination going to the heart and inner nature of everything. The bride's lips red (Sir John Suckling); fair Rosamond's, struck by Eleanor (Warner); the lamp of life, 'as the radiant clouds of morning through thin clouds' (Shelley); and then the bare bones of Yorick's skull (*Hamlet* V. i. 207):—

'Here hung those lips that I have kissed, I know not how oft! Where be your gibes now? your gambols? your songs? your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar?'

'There is the essence of life, and the full power of imagination.

'Again compare Milton's flowers in *Lycidas* with Perdita's (in the *Winter's Tale*). In Milton it happens, I think generally, and in the case before us most certainly, that the imagination is mixed and broken with fancy, and so the strength of the imagery is part of iron and part of clay:—

'Bring the rathe primrose, that forsaken dies, (*Imagination*)
The tufted crow-toe and pale jessamine, (*Nugatory*)
The white pink and the pansy freak'd with jet, (*Fancy*)
The glowing violet, (*Imagination*)
The musk rose and the well-attir'd woodbine, (*Fancy, vulgar*)
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head, (*Imagination*)
And every flower that sad embroidery wears.' (*Mixed*)

'Then hear Perdita:—

'O, Proserpina,
For the flowers now, that frighted thou let'st fall
From Dis's waggon. Daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty. Violets, dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath. Pale primroses
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phœbus in his strength, a malady
Most incident to maids.'

'Observe how the imagination in these last lines goes into the very inmost soul of every flower, after having toucht them all at first with that heavenly timidness, the shadow of Proserpine's, and gilded them with celestial gathering; and never stops on their spots or bodily shapes; while Milton sticks in the stains upon them, and puts us off with that unhappy freak of jet in the very flower that, without this bit of paper-staining, would have been the most precious to us of all. 'There is pansies: that's for thoughts.' (Ophelia, in *Hamlet*.)

it, and his undoubtedly prior training as an actor,[1] render it probable; but in characterization his growth from *Loves Labours Lost* to *Henry IV.* was wonderfully rapid and sure. Much higher than that he could not grow, though he could spread his branches over all the earth. In knowledge of life he increast to the end;[2] in wisdom he ripend; leaving his works to us, a joy and possession for ever.

§ 5. These works I would have the student read in the following order, setting aside *Titus Andronicus* (quite early) and *Henry VI.* (recast before *Henry IV.*), till he is able to judge of them for himself.

Shakspere began his career with Love—its vagaries and its sorrows,—Fun, and Light Comedy, *Venus and Adonis* (full of youthful passion, and notes of his Stratford country life[3]); *Love's Labour's Lost* (full of brilliant word-play and wit); *The Comedy of Errors* (a farce full of bustle and fun, yet with a pathetic background, p. 135); *Midsummer Night's Dream* (a wedding-play, joining fairyland to Stratford clowndom, first revealing a genius to which any height must be within reach); *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (showing, besides much comedy, the quick versatile Italian nature that so took Shakspere, and the evils of self-abandonment to love, p. 152). Then, in more serious vein, he coupld Love with Pathos and Tragedy, and in the Southern passion and despair of *Romeo and Juliet* showd again a genius never equalld by any but himself. With this beautiful and pathetic play should be read Shakspere's earlier *Lucrece*[4] (in which he rivalld the tender pity of Chaucer's *Troylus*), and the king-and-countess episode in *Edward III.* (see p. xxxi. above), in which (if

[1] Though the earliest print of Shakspere's name as an actor is 1594 (found by Mr. Halliwell), yet Mr. R. Simpson's quotations about 'feathers' in *The Academy*, April 4th, 1874, p. 368, col. 2, show that Greene, when calling Shakspere an upstart crow 'beautified with our feathers' (G.'s posthumus *Groatesworth of Wit*, 1592) meant to speak of him as an actor, and evidently then a well-known one, as well as an author. In 1598 Shakspere acted in Ben Jonson's 'Every Man in his Humour:' see p. 72 of this comedy in Jonson's *Works*, 1616.

[2] Mr. Hales, in *Academy*, Jan. 17, 1874, p. 63, col. 3.

[3] In the 'Venus' it is not only the well-known descriptions of the horse (l. 260–318), and the hare-hunt (l. 673–708), that show the Stratford man, but the touches of the overflowing Avon (72), the two silver doves (366), the milch doe and fawn in some brake in Charlecote Park (875–6), the red morn (453), of which the weatherwise say:—

> A red sky at night 's a shepherd's delight;
> A red sky at morning 's a shepherd's warning;

the hush of the wind before it rains (458), the many clouds consulting for foul weather (972), the night owl (531), the lark (853), &c. &c.; just as the artist (289) and the shrill-tongued tapsters (849) show the taste of London life.—F. J. F., in *The Academy*, Aug. 15, 1874, p. 179, col. 1.

[4] It must have been written some time after the *Venus* as its proportion of unstopt lines is 1 in 10·81 (174 such lines to the poem's 1,855) against the *Venus's* 1 in 25·40 (47 run-on lines in 1,194). The tide through old London Bridge is in l. 1,667 of *Lucrece*.

it be his) his first pure noble English woman-and-wife appears.[1] This same Pathos and Tragedy he took with him when he began his first national and patriotic, or Historical Plays, with *Richard II.* without comedy, or prose, but with its noble Gaunt, and its weak and erring king meeting the death he deservd. The feeling heightend in *Richard III.* (a play in which everything is sacrifict to one character,—all is on the strain throughout (possibly with some of Marlowe's 'furious line,'—and) which is in intensity[2] the precursor of *Macbeth*); it was continu'd through *King John* (a panorama of fine scenes almost unconnected, save by Faulconbridge, but picturing that passionate love and yearning of Constance for her boy, which no one who has lost a child can ever forget[3]); though lessend in his recast of *Henry VI.*,—

[1] I put this forward only as a question deserving the careful attention of students. Having read this episode three times, I cannot say positively that it is Shakspere's. I think it worthy of him in his younger days (the play was acted before 1596); and I do not think that Mr. Neil's point (p. 90) makes against this, that if Shakspere had been the author of *Edward III.* he would hardly have written thus of Lucrece:—

> Arise, true English lady! whom our isle
> May better boast of, than e'er Roman might
> *Of her, whose ransack'd treasury hath task'd*
> *The vain endeavour of so many pens.*
>
> *Tauchnitz ed. p. 80, at foot.*

This is just what the author of a *Lucrece* should have said of his own and others' work. And, as Mr. Hales says, the two following passages look like the same man's work:—

> Out with the moon-line! I will none of it!
> And let me have her liken'd to the sun!
> Say, she hath thrice more splendour than the sun,
> That her perfection emulates the sun,
> That she breeds sweets as plenteous as the sun,
> That she doth thaw cold winter like the sun,
> That she doth cheer fresh summer like the sun,
> And, if this application to the sun,
> Bid her be free and general as the sun,
> Who smiles upon the basest weed that grows,
> As lovingly as on the fragrant rose.
>
> *Edw. III.* ii. 1, Tauchnitz ed., p. 16.

> *Bass.* Sweet Portia,
> If you did know to whom I gave the ring,
> If you did know for whom I gave the ring,
> And would conceive for what I gave the ring,
> And how unwillingly I left the ring,
> When nought would be accepted but the ring,
> You would abate the strength of your displeasure.
> *Por.* If you had known the virtue of the ring,
> Or half her worthiness that gave the ring,
> Or your own honour to contain the ring,
> You would not then have parted with the ring.
>
> *Merchant of Venice*, v. i. 193–202: Globe, p. 203, col. 1.

[2] I take Shylock to be Shakspere's intensest male character, Timon and Lear the next. Constance (in *King John*) the most intense female character.

[3] If the date of *King John* is 1596—which I doubt,—then those most touching speeches of Constance about her boy Arthur may be fairly linkt with Shakspere's feelings on the death of his own only boy Hamnet, who was buri'd on August 11, 1596, at Stratford.

if that comes here—(Part II. with its noble Gloster and the rich humour of Cade; Part III. with its fierce Margaret, its Warwick and York). Shakspere brightend again in *The Merchant of Venice* (with its Portia graceful, loving, witty, and wise, though the strain is still seen in Shylock); and then perhaps re-wrote the amusing Petruchio-Katharine-Grumio scenes in *The Taming of the Shrew*, with its most racy Induction (see p. xxix.). In his three comedies of Falstaff, or the First and Second Parts of *Henry IV.* and the *Merry Wives*,[1] he culminated in humour and comic power.[2] Never equalld has Falstaff been, and never will be, I believe. The drama of Shakspere's hero, *Henry V.* (in 1599),[3] then closd the connected series of his historical plays,[4] with its splendid bursts of patriotism—possibly against

[1] The *Merry Wives* was a piece hastily written to please Queen Elizabeth: so says tradition; and rightly, I believe. No doubt it was revis'd; but for intrinsic merit it cannot stand for a moment by *Henry IV.*

[2] *Henry IV.*, or at least the First Part of it, must have been written in or about 1597, the proudest year of Shakspere's early life, when, not quite thirty-three, he bought New Place, 'the great house' of Stratford.

[3] In 1599 also, Shakspere became a partner in some of the profits of the Globe. See the "Memorial of Cutbert Burbage, and Winifred his brother's wife, and William his sonne," in 1635, to the Lord Chamberlaine, discovered by Mr. J. O. Halliwell in 1870, made public by him in 1874, printed by me from the Record Office MS. in *The Academy*, March 7, and since issued privately by Mr. Halliwell. 'The father of us, Cutbert and Richard Burbage, was the first builder of playhowses, and was himselfe in his younger yeeres a player. "The theater" hee built with many hundred poundes taken up at interest. The players that lived in those first times had only the profitts arising from the dores; but now the players receave all the commings in at the dores to themselves, and halfe the galleries from the houskepers [the owners or lessees of the theatre]. Hee built this house upon leased ground, by which meanes the landlord and hee had a great suite in law, and, by his death, the like troubles fell on us his sonnes: wee then bethought us of altering from thence, and at like expence built the Globe [A.D. 1599: Mr. Halliwell says] with more summes of money taken up at interest, which lay heavy on us many yeares; *and to ourselves wee joyned those deserveing men, Shakspere, Hemings, Condall, Philips, and others, partners in the profittes of that they call the House.* . . .

'Thus, Right Honorable, as concerning the Globe, where wee ourselves are but lessees. Now for the Blackfriers: that is our inheritance; our father purchased it at extreame rates, and made it into a playhouse with great charge and trouble: which after was leased out to one Evans that first sett up the boyes commonly called the Queenes Majesties Children of the Chappell. In processe of time, the boyes growing up to bee men, which were Underwood, Field, Ostler, and were taken to strengthen the King's service; and the more to strengthen the service, the boyes dayly wearing out, it was considered that house would bee as fitt for ourselves, and soe [we] purchased the lease remaining from Evans, with our money, and placed *men players, which were Hemings, Condall, Shakspeare,' &c.* This could not have been till, or after the year 1603, when James succeeded Elizabeth, and there was a 'King's service.' Besides, the Warrant of King James making Shakspere's company the King's Company, and which bears date May 17th, 1603, mentions only the Globe, as this Company's 'now usuall house.'

[4] *Henry VIII.*, not part of the series, was added at the end of Shakspere's life. See Mr. Richard Simpson's able Paper on the 'Politics of Shakspere's Historical

the contemporary glorification of the great Henri Quatre of France—though they cannot save the play from its weakness as a drama, necessitated by a battle (Agincourt) standing for its plot. It was succeeded by a brilliant set of comedies, possibly for the newly-opend Globe theatre:—*Much Ado about Nothing* (glittering with stars of wit and richest humour:—what do not the names Benedick and Beatrice, Dogberry and Verges mean to a Shakspere-reader's ear?—); *As You Like It* with its moral, 'Sweet are the uses of adversity,' its freshness of greenwood life, wherein men 'fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world'; and yet with its melancholy Jaques, who will not be comforted or glad, a prelude to the sadder time so close at hand. *Twelfth Night* (with its pompous goose of a Malvolio, its sharp Maria, its Toby Belch and Andrew Aguecheek, its cross-purposes in love). *All's Well* (possibly the recast of *Love's Labours Wonne*, with its unpleasant plot of a willing wife hunting and catching her unwilling husband, but with its inimitable braggart Parolles).

Here Shakspere's 'Sonnets' should be read, and the tender sensitive nature that produced them commund with. Over and over again must they be read, till at least their main outlines are clear. The key to them is No. CXLIV. on 'the man right fair,' who is the poet's 'better angel,' and 'the worser spirit a woman colour'd ill.' That Gervinus's interpretation of them (p. 461–463)—from Armitage Brown—is right, I have no doubt. The later 'Sonnets' are the best preparation for *Hamlet*.

Undoubtedly at this time a shadow of darkness fell upon Shakspere. What causes brought it, we cannot certainly tell. Private reasons the 'Sonnets' show. He was deserted by his mistress—wrongly but madly lovd by him, in spite of the struggles of his better nature—for his dearest friend; and this for a time severd their friendship, never to be restord again as it first was. Public reasons there were: his great patron and friend Southampton[1] was declard traitor and imprisond in 1601; was threatend with death, and in almost

Plays' in *The New Shakspere Soc.'s Trans.*, 1874 or–5. He argues 'that Shakspere was of the Essex party, against Burghley and Cecil; that in *Henry VI.* and *Richard II.* he showd Elizabeth misled by Leicester, and then by Burghley (she herself said she was Richard II.); that *John* was aimd at the many callers for foreign intervention in her time, his wars were hers of 1585; *Henry IV.* showd how she us'd and cast off helpers, and picturd the Northern Rebellion in her reign (1569); *Henry V.* told her how foreign war united a nation, and brought about religious toleration at home (this was Essex's policy); *Henry VIII.* brought out the end of the constantly falling state of the old nobility, (which Shakspere, in common with so many Elizabethans, lamented,) and the consummation of the full power of the Crown, two threads running through English history and Shakspere's Historical Plays. Shakspere's changes of the Chronicles were not only for dramatic effect, but to show the lessons he wisht them to teach on the political circumstances of his time.'

[1] This is Mr. Hales's suggestion. In the dedication to *Lucrece*, Shakspere says to Southampton, 'The love I dedicate to your lordship is without end.'

daily danger of it till Elizabeth's own death in 1603 set him free through King James: the rebellion and execution of Essex, Southampton's friend and the cause of his ruin, to whom Shakspere had two years before alluded with pride in his Prologue to *Henry V.*, Act v. l. 30. At any rate, the times were out of joint. Shakspere was stirrd to his inmost depths, and gave forth the grandest series of Tragedies that the world has ever seen: *Hamlet* (followd by the tragi-comedy *Measure for Measure*), *Julius Cæsar*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Lear*, *Troilus and Cressida* (see p. xxxiii.), *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, *Timon*; showing what subjects were then kin to his frame of mind; how he felt, and struggld with, the stern realities of life; how he dwelt on the weakness and baseness of men, their treachery as friends and subjects, their lawless lust and ungovernd jealousy as lovers, their serpent-like ingratitude as children, their fickleness and disgustfulness as the many-headed mob, fit only to be spit upon and curst: over all he held the terrors of conscience and the avenging sword of fate.

But Shakspere could not end thus. After the darkness came light; after the storm, calm; and in the closing series of his plays—three tragedies, two comedies, and one history—inspird, I believe, by his renewd family-life at Stratford[1]—he speaks of reconciliation and peace. His Tragedies now, for the first time, end happily; his Comedies have a quite new fulness of meaning and love; his History (though partly by Fletcher's mouth) speaks an injurd wife's forgiveness of deepest wrongs, and prophesies blessings. All the plays turn on broken family ties united, or their breach forgiven unavengd. With wife and daughters again around him, the faultful past was rememberd only that the present union might be closer. In *Pericles* (see p. xxviii.) the bereavd king finds once more his lost daughter, whose supposd death had made him dumb; and then both are united to the wife-and-mother whose seeming corpse had been committed to the waves. In *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (see p. xxviii.), in which Shakspere again went back to Chaucer, his early teacher (p. xxxvi.) and delight, the forsworn brother (Arcite) dies repentant, recommending his brother (Palamon) to Emelye, his first love. In *Cymbeline* the true wife Imogen—'the most perfect' Imogen—wrongly and hastily mistrusted, rises from desertion and seeming death, to forgive and clasp to her ever-loving heart the husband who had doubted her: no Desdemona end for her.[2]

[1] Unless Thomas Greene, the Town Clerk of Stratford, was living at New Place with his 'cosen Shakspere' or his family, Shakspere cannot well have retired thither till after September 1609, as Greene then said a G. Brown might stay longer in his house, "the rather because I perceyved I might stay another yere at New Place." By June 21, 1611, Thomas Greene is probably in his new house, as an order was made that the town is 'to repare the churchyard wall at Mr. Greene's dwelling place.'—Halliwell's *Hist. of New Place.*

[2] Note, too, how, in *Cymbeline*, Shakspere contrasts the evils of court life with the simplicity and innocence of country life, life then around him, as I contend.

In *The Tempest*—wherein Shakspere 'treads on the confines of other worlds'—wherein his new type of Stratford maiden is idealizd into Miranda, 'so delicately refind, all but ethereal, in her virgin innocence' (Mrs. Jameson),—his lesson is still of the breaking of family ties—brother and brother—repented of and forgiven :—

> The rarer action is
> In virtue than in vengeance: they, being penitent,
> The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
> Not a froune further.—V. i. 27–30; *Fol.* p. 16, col 2.

If with this play he really meant to end his poetic life,[1] to break the staff of his enchantment, 'bury it certain fathoms in the earth, and, deeper than did ever plummet sound,' drown his book (v. i. 54–7,) he changd his mind, and in the *Winter's Tale* gave us again the noble wife, Hermione, calm in her dignity, saintlike in her patience, forgiving her basely jealous and vindictive husband, while he united them again —as in *Pericles*—with their lost daughter Perdita, sweet with the fragrance of her Stratford flowers of spring, artless and beautiful, tender and noble-naturd, as Shakspere alone could make her.

In *Henry VIII.* he returns again to the deserted wife. Katharine the divorced, pious, affectionate, simple, magnanimous,—in one sense, 'the triumph of Shakespeare's genius and his wisdom' (Mrs. Jameson, pp. 379, 384)—forgives her ruffian husband 'all, and prays God to do so likewise':—

> tell him, in death I blest him,
> For so I will. Mine eyes grow dimme: Farewell.
> *Fol.* p. 226.

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[1] Prof. Karl Elze's attempt, in 1872, to prove that the *Tempest* was written in 1604, seems to me a failure. It may be thus stated: Because Ben Jonson in 1614 (Introduction to *Bartholomew Fair*) plainly sneerd at Shakspere's *Tempest* and *Winter's Tale* [which must therefore, surely, have been two of his latest plays, and freshest in the audience's mind], therefore his allusion in *Volpone* 1607 (acted 1605), when speaking of Guarini—

> 'All our English writers,
> I mean such as are happy in the Italian,
> Will deign to steal out of this author, mainly,
> Almost as much as from Montagnié . . .'

was a cut at Shakspere's borrowing from Montaigne in *The Tempest*, II. i. 147, &c., —although he never borrowd from Guarini;—and therefore *The Tempest* was written in 1604. That the poorer original of Shakspere's 'gorgeous palaces' vanishing, is in the Earl of Sterline's *Darius* (1603); that Lord Southampton joind in fitting out a ship to sail to Virginia in 1605 (so that Caliban can be turnd into a native American, and Prospero into Lord Southampton!), and that a pamphlet in 1604 describd 'a monstrous Fish that appeard in the form of a Woman from her waist upwards,' cannot strengthen the knees of Prof. Elze's weak hypothesis, is but too plain. All the metrical and æsthetic evidence is in favour of the late date of the *Tempest* (? 1610) which Jonson's allusion in *Bartholomew Fair* confirms. Prof. Elze's date of 1603 for *Henry VIII.* must also be given up.

And thus, forgiven and forgiving,[1] full of the highest wisdom and of peace, at one with family, and friends, and foes, in harmony with Avon's flow and Stratford's level meads, Shakspere closd his life on earth.[2]

[1] It is certain, I think, that in his latest plays, of the Fourth Period, Shakspere was also teaching himself the lesson of forgiveness for the wrongs and disappointments he had sufferd, and which were reflected in the Tragedies of his Third Period. See on this my friend Prof. Dowden's forthcoming 'Mind and Art of Shakspere' (H. S. King & Co.), with its fine and right likening of Shakspere to a ship, beaten and storm-tost, but yet entering harbour with sails full-set, to anchor in peace. I quote it from the MS. of his Lectures:—

'There are lovers of Shakspere so jealous of his honour that they are unable to suppose that any grave moral flaw could have impaired the perfection of his life and manhood. To me Shakspere appears to have been a man who, by strenuous effort and with the aid of the good powers of the world, saved himself,—so as by fire. Before Shakspere zealots demand our attention to ingenious theories to establish the immaculateness of Shakspere's life, let them show that his writings never offend. When they have shown that Shakspere's poetry possesses the proud virginity of Milton's poetry, they may then go on to show that Shakspere's youth was devoted to an ideal of moral purity and elevation like the youth of Milton. I certainly should not infer from Shakspere's writings that he held himself with virginal strength and pride remote from the blameful pleasures of the world. What I do *not* find anywhere in the plays of Shakspere is a single cold-blooded, hard or selfish line—all is warm, sensitive, vital, radiant with delight, or a-thrill with pain. And what I dare to affirm of Shakspere's life is, that whatever its sins may have been, they were not hard, selfish, deliberate, cold-blooded sins. The errors of his heart originated in his sensitiveness, in his imagination (not at first strictly trained to fidelity to the fact), in his quick sense of existence, and in the self-abandoning devotion of his heart. There are some noble lines by Chapman in which he pictures to himself the life of great energy, enthusiasms and passions, which for ever stands upon the edge of utmost danger, and yet for ever remains in absolute security:—

> Give me a spirit that on life's rough sea
> Loves to have his sails filled with a lusty wind
> Even till his sail-yards tremble, his masts crack,
> And his rapt ship runs on her side so low
> That she drinks water, and her keel ploughs air;
> There is no danger to the man that knows
> What life and death is; there's not any law
> Exceeds his knowledge; neither is it lawful
> That he should stoop to any other law.

Such a master-spirit pressing forward under strained canvas was Shakspere. If the ship dipped and drank water, she rose again; and at length we see her within view of her haven, sailing under a large, calm wind, not without tokens of stress of weather, but if battered, yet unbroken, by the waves. It is to dull lethargic lives that a moral accident is fatal, because they are tending no whither, and lack energy and momentum to right themselves again. To say anything against decent lethargic vices and timid virtues, anything to the advantage of the strenuous life of bold action and eager emotion which necessarily incurs risks and sometimes suffers, is, I am aware, "dangerous." Well, then, be it so; it is dangerous.'

[2] In his *History of New Place*, Mr. Halliwell has suggested a more probable cause for Shakspere's death than the no doubt groundless traditional one (after 1662) of the drinking bout with Drayton and Ben Jonson, namely, that the

Now all that I have written on the succession of Shakspere's works in relation to the man Shakspere is liable to the objector's 'Pooh! all stuff! Shakspere wrote comedies and tragedies for his company just as the Burbages told him to. His comedies were produc'd for some leading comic actor, and his tragedies for his friend and partner Richard Burbage, the great tragedian. Neither reflected his own feelings, except professionally, any more than Macbeth's or Othello's did Burbage's when he acted them.' Take it so, if you will; but still, I say, Do follow the course of Shakspere's mind; still do commune with the creations of his brain as they flowd from it; still note his wondrous growth in that sensibility and intensity, far beyond all other men's, that enabld him to throw himself into all the varid figures of his plays with ever-increasing power and skill; still watch his greatening of wisdom and knowledge of life, his dazzling wit and ever-flowing humour; still gaze at, and glory in, his dream of, nay, his breathing and living Fair Women, who enchant even Taine, and win the reverence of Gervinus and all true-sould men—beside whom Dante's Beatrice alone is fit to stand:—and then ask yourself whether the choice of Shakspere's series of subjects was fixt by others' orders, or chance, *or* by his own frame of mind, his own mood; whether his young plays of love and fun, of patriotism and war,[1] of humour and wit, showd his own early manhood or not, his time of successful struggle, and happy enjoyment of its fruits; whether the dark questionings of 'Hamlet,' the mingling with lawlessness, treachery, hatred, revenge, had nothing to do with his own later inner life; whether the reconciliation and peace of his latest plays were independent of his new quiet home-life at Stratford with its peace. I am content to abide by your answer. Depend on it that what our greatest Victorian poetess, Mrs. Barrett Browning, though a lyrist, said of her own poetry, is true, to a great extent, of Shakspere in his dramas, 'They have my heart and life in them; they are not empty shells.' The feelings were in his soul; he put them into words; and that is why the world is at his feet.

pigsties and nuisances which the Corporation books show to have existed in Chapel Lane, which ran the whole length of New Place, bred the fever of which Shakspere is said to have died.

Mr. Halliwell gives several extracts from the books, as '1605: the Chamberlaines shall gyve warning to Henry Smyth to plucke downe his pigges cote which is built nere the chapple wall, and the house of office (=privy) there.'—*New Place*, p. 29.

[1] They had, and naturally, their leaven of pathos and tragedy, as I have shown above.

Trial Table of the Order of Shakspere's Plays.

[This, like all other tables, must be lookt on as merely tentative, and open to modification for any good reasons. But if only it comes near the truth, then reading the plays in its order will the sooner enable the student to find out its mistakes. (M. stands for 'mentioned by Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia*, 1598.') In his introductory Essays to *Shakespeare's Dramatische Werke* (German Shakespeare Society) Prof. Hertzberg dates *Titus* 1587–9, *Love's Labours Lost* 1592, *Comedy of Errors* about New Year's Day 1591, *Two Gentlemen* 1592, *All's Well* 1603, *Troilus and Cressida* 1603, and *Cymbeline* 1611. Mr. Grant White dates *Richard II.* 1595, *Richard III.* 1593–4.]

	Supposd Date	Earliest Allusion	Date of Publication
First Period.			
Venus and Adonis	1585–7		1593*
Titus Andronicus toucht up	(?) 1588	1594 M	[(?) 1594] 1600
Love's Labours Lost	1588–9	1598 M	1598 (amended)
[Loves Labours Wonne	]	1598 M	
Comedy of Errors	1589–91	1594 M	1623
Midsummer Night's Dream (? 2 dates)	1590–1	1598 M	1600
Two Gentlemen of Verona	1590–2	1598 M	1623
(?) 1 Henry VI. toucht-up	(?) 1590–2		1623
(?) Troilus and Cressida, begun		1594	1594
(?) Lucrece		1595 M	1597
Romeo and Juliet	(?) 1591–3		
(?) A Lover's Complaint		?1595 M	1597
Richard II.	(?) 1593–4	?1595 M	1597
Richard III.	1594		1623
2 & 3 Henry VI. recast	(?) 1594–5	1598 M	1623
John	1595		
Second Period.			
Merchant of Venice	(?) 1596	1598 M	1600†
Taming of the Shrew, part	(?) 1596–7		1623*[1]
1 Henry IV.	1596–7‡	1598 M	1598
2 Henry IV.	1597–8‡	1598 M	1600
Merry Wives	1598–9	1602	1602
Henry V.	1599‡	1599	1600
Much Ado	1599–1600‡	1600	1600
As you Like it	1600‡	1600	1623§
Twelfth Night	1601‡	1602	1623
All's Well (? L's. L. Wonne recast)	1601–2		1623
Sonnets	(?) 1592–1602	1598 M	1609
Third Period.			
Hamlet	1602–3‡	(?)	1603*
Measure for Measure	(?) 1603		1623
Julius Cæsar	(?) 1601–3	(?)	1623
Othello	(?) 1604	1610	1622

* Enterd 1 year before at Stationers' Hall.
† Enterd 2 years before at Stationers' Hall.
‡ May be lookt-on as fairly certain.
§ Enterd in the Stationers' Registers in 1600.
[1] 'The Taming of *a* Shrew' was publisht in 1604.

Trial Table of the Order of Shakspere's Plays—continu'd.

	Supposd Date	Earliest Allusion	Date of Publication
Macbeth	1605–6‡	1610	1623
Lear	1605–6‡	1606	1608*
Troilus and Cressida (?) completed	1606–7	1609	1609
Antony and Cleopatra	1606–7	1608 (?)	1623
Coriolanus	(?) 1607–8		1623
Timon, part	1607–8		1623
FOURTH PERIOD.			
Pericles, part	1608‡	1608	1609*
Two Noble Kinsmen, part	1609–12		1634
Tempest	(?) 1610	?1614	1623
Cymbeline	1610–12		1623
Winter's Tale	(?) 1611	1611	1623
Henry VIII., part	1613‡	1613 (?)	1623

* Enterd 1 year before at Stationers' Hall.
‡ May be lookt-on as fairly certain.

§ 6. Now of a few helps to reading Shakspere. 1. As to Text: have the 'Globe' edition (Macmillan, 3*s.* 6*d.*) because its lines are numberd, and for sound text; but do not ruin your eyes by reading it. For reading, get a small 8vo. clear-type edition like Singer's, with notes —a cheap re-issue, in half-crown volumes, is just coming out (G. Bell and Sons). Get (if you can afford it) Mr. Furness's admirable Variorum edition of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth* (15*s.* each, A. R. Smith); *Hamlet* is preparing; (the other plays will slowly follow); and, for their notes, Messrs. Clark and Wright's little Clarendon-Press edition of plays at 2*s.* or 2*s.* 6*d.* each (their 8vo. Cambridge edition with most valuable full collations, is out of print); and Craik's *Julius Cæsar*. 2. Glossaries, &c.: Mrs. Cowden's Clarke's 'Concordance' to the Plays (25*s.*), and Mrs. H. H. Furness's to the Minor Poems (15*s.*); Dr. Schmidt's most useful 'Shakespeare-Lexicon' (vol. i., A to L, 13*s.* 6*d.* Williams and Norgate), which well arranges the passages under their senses, and the parts of speech of the head-word; Dyce's 'Glossary' (last vol. of his Shakspere), and Nares's 'Glossary' (2 vols., 24*s.*, A. R. Smith). 3. Grammar and Metre: Dr. Abbott's 'Shakespearian Grammar' (Macmillan, 6*s.*) indispensable; but with some misscansions that will 'absolutely sear' you, as Mr. Ellis says, and over some of which you will groan, as we did in concert at the Philological Society when Professor Mayor read them (see his Paper in 'Phil. Soc. Trans.,' 1874, now in the press. Dr. Abbott, I need not say, ridicules our scannings). W. Sidney Walker's three volumes of Shakspere Text-criticism (15*s.*, A. R. Smith) are excellent.[1] C. Bathurst's capital little half-crown volume

[1] Dr. Ingleby describes his just publisht *Still Lion* as 'indications of a

on the end-stopt and unstopt line,—'Changes in Shakespeare's Versification at different Periods of his Life' (J. W. Parker and Son)—is unluckily out of print. 4. Pronunciation: Mr. A. J. Ellis's 'Early English Pronunciation with Special Reference to Chaucer and Shakespeare' (three Parts, 30*s.*, Asher and Co.; or Part iii. only, the Shakespeare Part [p. 917–96], 10*s.* 5. Commentaries: First, Gervinus's 'Commentaries' (12*s.*, Smith and Elder)[1]; second, Mrs. Jameson's 'Characteristics of Women,' that is, Shakspere's Women—an enthusiastic and beautiful book (5*s.*, Routledge); third, S. T. Coleridge's 'Shakespeare Lectures,' &c., from vol. ii. of his 'Biographia Literaria' (3*s.* 6*d.*: Howell, Liverpool). Then, if you wish for more books, Hudson's 'Shakespeare, his Life, Art, and Characters' (of his twenty-five greatest plays) (2 vols., 12*s.*, Ginn, Boston, U.S.; Sampson Low, &c.); T. P. Courtenay's matter-of-fact 'Commentaries on the Historical Plays' (2 vols., Colburn, 1840); Prof. Dowden's forthcoming, 'Mind and Art of Shakspere' (H. S. King and Co.); Schlegel's 'Dramatic Art' (3*s.* 6*d.*), and Hazlitt's thin 'Characters of Shakespeare's Plays' (2*s.*, G. Bell and Sons); Mr. John R. Wise's charming little book on 'Shakespeare: his Birthplace and its Neighbourhood (3*s.* 6*d.*, Smith and Elder); Mr. Roach Smith's 'Rural Life of Shakespeare' (? 2*s.* 6*d.*, George Bell and Sons). And certainly buy a copy of Booth's admirable Reprint of the First Folio of 1623 (12*s.* 6*d.*, Glaisher, 265, High Holborn; with the Quarto of 'Much Adoe,' for 1*s.*) For the facts of Shakspere's Life, chronologically arrangd, Mr. S. Neil's cheap little 'Shakespeare: a Critical Biography' (Houlston and Wright) is the best book. On the 'Sonnets,' get the best book, Armitage Brown's (? 6*s.*, A. R. Smith); for the allegorical view of them, Mr. R. Simpson's 'Philosophy of Shakespeare's Sonnets' (3*s.* 6*d.*, Trübner); for useful information and a mistaken theory, Mr. Gerald Massey's book—the edition sold off at 5*s.* 6*d.* (Reeves and Turner).—Of course, subscribe a guinea a year to the New Shakspere Society (Hon. Sec. A. G. Snelgrove, Esq., London Hospital, E.), read its Papers, and work its Texts, specially the parallel ones.

Get one or two likely friends to join you in your Shakspere work, if you can, and fight out all your and their difficulties in common: worry every line; eschew the vice of wholesale emendation. Get up a party of ten or twelve men and four or six women to read the plays in succession at one another's houses, or elsewhere, once a fortnight, and discuss each for half an hour after each reading. Do all you can to further the study of Shakspere, chronologically and as a whole, throughout the nation.

systematic Hermeneutic [science of interpretation] of Shakspere's text.' It is strongly against plausible emendations, and is well worth careful study.

[1] Prof. Dowden, who has been through all the German commentators, thinks Kreyssig's *Vorlesungen über Shakespeare* (a big book), and *Shakespeare-Fragen* (a little book), the best popular introduction in German to Shakspere.

Lastly, go to Stratford-upon-Avon, and see the town where Shakspere was born, and bred, and died; the country over which he wanderd and playd when a boy, whose beauties and whose lore, as a man, he put into his plays. Go either in spring, in April, 'when the greatest poet was born in Nature's sweetest time,' and let Mr. Wise ('Shakespeare: his Birthplace and its Neighbourhood,' p. 44, 58, &c.) tell you how 'everything is full of beauty' that you'll see; or go in full summer, as I did one afternoon in July this year. See first the little low room where tradition says Shakspere was born, though his father did not buy the house till eleven years after his birth;[1] look at the foundations of 'New Place,' walk on the site of Shakspere's house, in the garden whose soil he must often have trod, thinking of his boyhood and hasty marriage, of London, with its trials and triumphs, and the wonders he had created for its delight; follow his body, past the school where he learnt, to its grave in the Avon-side church ringd with elms; see the worn slab that covers his bones, with wife's and daughter's beside; look up at the bust which figures the case of the brain and heart that have so enricht the world, which shows you more truly than anything else what Shakspere was like in the flesh; try to see in those hazel eyes, those death-drawn lips,[2] those ruddy cheeks, the light, the merriment, the tenderness, the wisdom, and love that once were theirs; walk by the full and quiet Avon's side, where the swan sails gently, by which the cattle feed; ask yourself what word sums up your feelings on these scenes: and answer, with me, 'Peace'!

Next morning, walk up the Welcombe road, across the old common lands whose enclosing Shakspere said 'he was not able to bear;' when up Rowley Bank, turn round; see the town nestle under its circling hills, shut in on the left by its green wall of trees. The corn is golden beside you. Meon Hill meets the sky in your front; its shoulder slants sharply to the spire of the church where Shakespeare's dust lies: away on the right is Broadway, lit with the sun; below it the ridge of

[1] He *may* have rented it before; but I expect that the former house, in Henley Street, in which John Shakspere dwelt, would have a better claim to be 'the birthplace,' if it were now known.

[2] 'We may mention—on the authority of Mr. Butcher, the very courteous clerk of Stratford Church, who saw the examination made—that two years ago Mr. Story, the great American sculptor, when at Stratford, made a very careful examination of Shakspere's bust from a raised scaffolding, and came to the conclusion that the face of the bust was modelled from a death-mask. The lower part of the face was very death-like; the upper lip was elongated and drawn up from the lower one by the shrinking of the nostrils, the first part of the face to 'go' after death; the eyebrows were neither of the same length nor on the same level; the depth from the eye to the ear was extraordinary; the cheeks were of different shapes, the left one being the more prominent at top. On the whole, Mr. Story felt certain of the bust being made from a death-mask.'—F. J. F., in *The Academy*, Aug. 22, 1874, p. 205, col. 3. *The Academy*, our 'leading literary paper,' should be read for Shakspere news.

Roomer Hill, yellow for harvest on the right, passing leftwards into a dark belt of trees to the church, their hollows filled with blue haze. In this nest is Shakspere's town. After gazing your fill on the fair scene before you, walk to the boat-place, paddle out for the best view of the elm-framd church, then by its river-borderd side to the stream below; get a beautiful view of the tower through a vista of trees beyond the low waterfall; then pass by cattle half-knee deep in the shallows, sluggishly whisking their tails, happily chewing the cud; go under Wire-Brake bank, whose trees droop down to the river, whose wood-pigeons greet you with coos; past many groups of grey willows, with showers of wild roses between; feathery reeds rise beside you, birds twitter about, the sky is blue overhead, your boat glides smoothly down stream: you feel the sweet content with which Shakspere must have lookt on the scene. Later, you wander to Shottery, to Ann Hathaway's cottage, where perchance in hot youth the poet made love. Then you ride through Charlecote's tall-elmd park, and see the deer whose ancestors he may have stolen; on to Warwick, with its castle rising grandly from Avon bank; back to Stratford, with a glorious view from the hill, on your left in your homeward ride.[1] Evening comes: you stroll again by the riverside, through groups of townsfolk pleasant to see, in well-to-do Sunday dress. From Cross-o'-th'-Hill you look at the fine view of church and town, backt by the Welcombe Hills; through Wire Brake[2] and ripe corn, you walk to the bridge that brings you to the opposite level bank of the stream. Then you lie down, chatting of Shakspere to your friend, while lovers in pairs pass lingering by, and the twilight comes. Then again you say that the peace of the place was fit for Shakspere's end, and that the memory of its quiet beauty will never away from your mind.

Yes, Stratford will help you to understand Shakspere.

These pages aim at giving, shortly, to beginners, such parts of the result of my last year's work at Shakspere—in scanty leisure—as I wish some one had given me on my first start at him. Of their immaturity, beside the ripeness of Gervinus, and of their unworthiness to appear before his book, I am only too painfully conscious. But as I have gone among working-men and private friends, I have been askt to put some of these things in print; and for my haste in thus doing it I willingly risk the blame of those who know far more than I do, being

[1] If you can, get on to ruind Kenilworth, where Shakspere may have seen Leicester's pageants before Elizabeth, in 1575 (see my edition of *Captain Cox*, Ballad Society), to use in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Heaven forbid that he should have turnd the great mason Captain into Bottom!

The young Stratford folk call their Sunday-evening stroll through this wooded bank, 'Going to Chapel.' That their devotions interested the attendants, I can say.

assurd that what I have written will be of use to others who know somewhat less than myself. Work at Shakspere, serious intelligent work, is what I want, from thousands of men and women who have hitherto neglected him. If they will give me that, they may abuse as they like, the mistakes they may find in these hints.

My thanks are due to my friends Professors Hertzberg, Wagner, Seeley, and Dowden, Mr. Spedding, Mr. Hales, Dr. Abbott, Mr. Halliwell, Dr. Ingleby, Mr. Aldis Wright, Mr. Wheatley, Mr. Malleson, &c. for their hints on this Introduction.

F. J. FURNIVALL.

3 ST. GEORGE'S SQUARE, N.W.
Sept. 16, 1874.

P.S.—Prof. Ingram, of Trin. Coll., Dublin, has just (Nov. 8) sent me his Paper on the weak- and light-endings in Shakspere. The 16 *weak-endings* are 'and, but[1] (=L. *sed*, and=*except*), by, for, from, if[1], on, nor, or, than, that, to, with.' The 54 *light-endings* are 'am, are, art, be, been, but (=only), can, could, did[2], do[2], does[2], dost[2], ere, had[2], has[2], hast[2], have[2], he, how[3], I, into, is, like, may, might, shall, shalt, she, should, since, so[4], such[4], they, thou, though, through, till, upon, was, we, were, what[5], when[5], where[5], which, while, whilst, who[5], whom[5], why[5], will, would, yet (=*tamen*), you.' Here is an extract from his

[1] Except in the combination *as if*.

[2] Only when us'd as auxiliaries.

[3] When not directly interrogative.

[4] When followd immediately by *as*. *Such* also, when followd by a substantive with an indefinite article, as 'Such a man.'

[5] When not directly interrogative. Prof. Ingram's Paper will appear in *The New Shakspere Society's Transactions*, Part 2. He says:—

'The weak-endings do not come in by slow degrees, but the poet seems to have thrown himself at once into this new structure of verse; 28 examples occurring in *Antony and Cleopatra*, whilst there are not more than two in any earlier play....

'As long as the light-endings remain very few, no conclusion with respect to the order of the plays can be based on them.

'But the very marked increase of their number in *Macbeth*, showing a strong development of the same tendency which, further on, produced the large number of weak-endings, seems to show that it was the latest of the plays preceding the weak-ending period....

'An examination of the weak-endings in *Henry VIII.* strikingly confirms the conclusions of Mr. Spedding respecting the two different systems of verse which co-exist in that play. In the Shaksperian portion, as marked off by him, there are 45 light-endings against 6 in Fletcher's part, and 37 weak-endings against 1 in Fletcher's part. And these weak-endings occur in every Shaksperian scene. The one weak-ending in Fletcher's portion occurs in a scene (iv. 1) which has not been uniformly assigned to Fletcher, and which, it is curious to observe, of all the Shaksperian scenes in the play approaches, in the matter of the feminine ending, nearest to Fletcher.... The date, also, which has been assigned by Mr. Spedding

table of these endings in the late plays, whose order alone they help to settle:—

	No. of light endings	No. of weak endings	No. of Verse lines in play	Percentage of light endings	Percentage of weak endings	Percentage of both together
Macbeth	21	2				
Timon	15	?	1112	1·35	?	?
Antony and Cleopatra	71	28	2803	2·53	1·00	3·53
Coriolanus	60	44	2563	2·34	1·71	4·05
Pericles (Shakspere part)	20	10	719	2·78	1·39	4·17
Tempest	42	25	1460	2·88	1·71	4·59
Cymbeline	78	52	2692	2·90	1·93	4·83
Winter's Tale	57	45	1825	3·12	2·47	5·59
Two Noble Kinsmen (non-Fletcher part)	50	34	1378	3·63	2·47	6·10
Henry VIII. (Sh's. part)	45	37	1146	3·93	3·23	7·16

to Shakspere's portion of *Henry VIII.* is confirmed by the Table, in opposition to the views of Elze and others. It appears to be without doubt his latest work; a conclusion which quite falls in with what is known from an external source as to the production in 1613 of a play which there is every reason to believe was the same.

'With respect to *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the weak-ending test confirms what has been otherwise shown by Mr. Hickson and others, namely, that here again there are two different systems of verse. In Fletcher's part there are 3 light endings to 50 in the other portion, and 1 weak-ending to 34. The weak-endings are found in every non-Fletcherian scene but two. One is i. 4, in which there are, exclusive of a song, but six lines in all. The other is iii. 3, which, curiously enough, as Mr. Furnivall remarks, the stopt-line test would give to Fletcher. The scene is one about which, notwithstanding what has been said by Mr. Hickson, there is not much to mark the authorship.

'The answer to the question—Who was the author of the non-Fletcherian portion of this play?—does not force itself on my mind with the same clear evidence as the conviction that the non-Shaksperian part of *Henry VIII* is by Fletcher. The choice of the story, in which the passion is, after all, of an artificial kind, the toleration of the "trash" which abounds in the underplot, the faintness (as I must persist in calling it) of the characterization, and, in general, the absence, except in occasional flashes, of the splendid genius which shows itself all through the last period of Shakspere, I have always found very perplexing. In reading the (so-called) Shaksperian part of the play, I do not often feel myself in contact with a mind of the first order. Still, it is certain that there is much in it that is *like* Shakspere, and some things that are worthy of him at his best; that the manner, in general, is more that of Shakspere than of any other contemporary dramatist; and that the system of verse is one which we do not find in any other, whilst it is, in all essentials, that of Shakspere's last period. I cannot name any one else who could have written this portion of the play. The weak-ending affords a ready test of the correctness of Knight's notion that Chapman was the writer. I have examined the play of *Bussy d'Ambois*, and do not find in it a single instance of the weak-ending, and, turning rapidly over Chapman's whole works, I see no evidence that he was ever at all given to it. If Shakspere be—as we seem forced to believe—the author of the part of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* now usually attributed to him, this will take its place in the series of his works between the *Winter's Tale* and *Henry VIII.*'

SHAKESPEARE COMMENTARIES.

INTRODUCTION.

THERE are in the present day a number of writings upon literature and men of letters, which, undertaken in consequence of some chance impulse, are treated with passing interest, received as superficial novelties, and read with transient curiosity.

Not so would I wish myself or others to estimate these reflections on Shakespeare. I cannot desire to offer them as a trifling recreation, for they treat of one of the richest and most important subjects which could be chosen.

For these reflections concern a man who by nature was so lavishly endowed, that even where the standard by which to estimate him was most wanting (as among the critics of the Romanic nations), an innate genius within him was ever divined, and a spirit unconscious of itself was admired in him; while those who understood how to penetrate into his works with an unprejudiced mind agreed more and more in the slowly acquired conviction that no age nor nation could easily, in any branch of knowledge, exhibit another man in whom the riches of genius, natural endowments, original talent, and versatility of power, were so great as in him.

And what is still more, these reflections concern a man who made the freest use of these liberal gifts of nature. Shakespeare was filled with the conviction—and he uttered it in various ways—that nature has not *given* to man, but has only *lent* to him; that she only gives him, that he should give again. He had gained the experience that it is not enough in the life

of an aspiring man to have once entered the path of honour, but that it is important ever undeviatingly to persevere in its track. And he followed out this conviction with the most untiring effort, whilst from the beginning to the end of his public career he displayed an activity which appears utterly incomprehensible, to us Germans especially, who have seen a Goethe and a Schiller (no insignificant men, indeed) struggling on in toilsome labour.

These reflections concern a man whose poetical superiority is felt universally, even by those incapable of accounting for it; whilst the intelligent thinker who is most thoroughly conversant with him, and can view him in his relations to the history of poetry in its full extent, sees him stand in the centre of modern dramatic literature in the place which Homer occupies in the history of epic poetry, as the revealing genius of this branch of art, and as one whose course and example can never with impunity be forsaken.

Lastly, these reflections concern a man whose entire merit cannot be measured by his poetic greatness alone. His works have been often called a secular Bible; Johnson said that from his representations a hermit might learn to estimate the affairs of the world; how often too has it been repeated, that in his poems the world and human nature can be seen as in a mirror! These are no exaggerated expressions, but reasonable, well-founded opinions. Human nature is not merely presented by him as in the ancient drama, in its typical characters; it is portrayed in his poetical creations in distinct individualised forms. We look within upon the inner life of the man in all its conditions; we gain a glimpse into the dealings of all classes and ranks, into all kinds of family and private life, into all phases of public history. We are introduced into the life of the Roman aristocracy, Republic, and monarchy; into the mythic heroic age of the first inhabitants of Gaul and Britain; into the adventurous world of the romantic period of chivalry and the Middle Ages, and upon the soil of English history both of mediæval and modern date. Upon all these epochs, and upon all these manifold circumstances, the poet looks from a superior point of view, so exalted above prejudice and party, above people and age, and with such a soundness and certainty of judgment in matters of art, custom, politics, and religion, that he appears to belong to a later and riper generation; he displays, in all the general or special conditions of the inner and

outer life, a wisdom and a knowledge of human nature which constitutes him a teacher of unquestionable authority; he has derived his views of morality so richly from his observation of the outer world, and he has so refined them by a rich inner life, that he deserves more than perhaps any other writer to be trustfully chosen as a guide in our passage through the world.

To study earnestly and eagerly the works of such a man, rewards every trouble and demands every effort. If we speak of poetry, the general reader thinks only of the highly-wrought productions of the day, and of the worthless novels which fill up tedious hours, and satisfy the need created and rendered habitual by our over-abundant literature. No thoughtful man can take pleasure in this mental craving; there is on the contrary an old and excellent rule, that for self-culture a little of the good should be read, but that little again and again. In no case will the application of this rule be so richly rewarded as in the study of Shakespeare. For he is ever new, and he cannot satiate. Not only he *may*, but he *must* be often read, and read with the accuracy with which we are accustomed at school to read the old classics; otherwise we seize not even the outer shell, much less the inner kernel. Every younger reader of Shakespeare will have made the experience that the mere subject of his plays, the plot, the action, even during the reading, is only with effort fully apprehended; and that soon, after one or even many readings, it is again wholly forgotten. As long as it stands thus with Shakespeare's plays, they have not been understood; to draw nearer to him demands honest industry and earnest endeavour.

Such is not only the experience of every single man, but of the whole world. For two hundred and fifty years have men toiled over this poet; they have not grown weary, digging in his works as in a mine, to bring to light all the noble metal they contain; and those who have been most active have been humble enough at last to declare that scarcely a single passage of this rich mine has been yet exhausted. And almost two centuries of this period had passed away before the men appeared who first recognised Shakespeare's entire merit and capacity, and divested his pure noble form of the confusion of prejudices which had veiled and disfigured it.

How was it that this poet should so long remain an enigma to the whole literary world and history? that so extraordinary a man should be so tardily appreciated, and even now should be

by many so imperfectly understood; and this, too, a poet who was in no wise indistinct concerning himself, and whom indeed many of his contemporaries seem to have fully valued?

To these questions there lies one answer in the character of his works themselves, and this answer will be obvious to us of itself at the conclusion of these reflections. The cause of the tardy appreciation of our poet lies above all in this, that he is an extraordinary man; the ordinary alone is comprehended quickly; it is only the commonplace that is free from misconception.

But another answer to the question lies in history. And out of her records I will mention in these introductory remarks the not unknown circumstances which caused a great spirit like this, whose mental energy had been so justly esteemed, to be so completely forgotten; I will then point out in what manner and through whose merits he was by degrees rescued from this oblivion; and in conclusion I will state in what relation this present work stands to similar past ones, which undertook the task of an explanation of Shakespeare's writings.

Before the time in which Shakespeare wrote (from 1590–1615), there existed in England no literature which was peculiarly the possession of the people. There were English poets, but no national English poetry; the most famous were learned men, who studied Latin and Italian poetry, and wrote in imitation of their model. Their sonnets, their allegories and their tales, could do little for a national poetry. Into the circle of these men Shakespeare entered with his narrative poems and sonnets. Even in these smaller works, with all their pure modesty and humility, the self-reliance of the poet was decidedly expressed. In his sonnets he promises the young friend to whom they are addressed an immortality through his verses which shall endure as 'long as men can breathe or eyes can see;' he challenges Time to do his utmost; in spite of his destroying power, his beloved shall, through his poetry, live in eternal youth. By his verses he will raise to him a monument 'which eyes, not yet created, shall o'erread,' and 'tongues to be' his being shall rehearse, when all 'the breathers of this world are dead.' Such virtue had his pen, that he shall still live, 'where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.'

This self-reliance of the poet must have greatly increased with time, when he looked back on the work of his life. In Henry the Eighth's time, the stage was in its rough beginning;

under Elizabeth it became the place where a national English literature first found a home. The chivalric epopee, the Italian novel and lyric, were borrowed from the stranger; but with the foundation of the drama the Saxon genius of the people was awakened, and the stage became a national property. The people streamed from the churches to the playhouses; the court and the nobles encouraged works of dramatic art; protection from the upper classes, favour among the lower, and the importance of its own productions, raised the stage in a quarter of a century from the humblest to the highest position. Its intrinsic value, Shakespeare might well say, had been given to it by himself alone; celebrated protectors of the stage among the nobility were his especial patrons; two very different rulers in turn favoured his works particularly, and the people delighted in the representation of his characters.

This estimation of the poet was anticipated and partly fathomed by his contemporaries, even when they could not justly appreciate it. Among them no one has more beautifully expressed the admiration of the age than Ben Jonson, who has been so often decried as an envier and an enemy of our poet. But in truth it was Shakespeare who first introduced him to the world and to the stage, and he was allied with him in a lasting friendship, which redounded as much to the high honour of both as did that union between our own German poetic Dioscuri; and although Jonson's narrower intellectual horizon prevented him from estimating entirely the extent of Shakespeare's genius, he was yet ever sufficiently forgetful of self to acknowledge with warm enthusiasm the honourable heart and the free open nature of his friend's character, as well as the high soaring of his richly imaginative and poetic mind. In his 'Poetaster' (1601) he uttered a eulogy upon Virgil's art and worldly wisdom, which, it is believed, was pointed at Shakespeare's great present fame, and predicted his greater future glory—

> That which he has writ
> Is with such judgment labour'd and distill'd
> Through all the needful uses of our lives,
> That, could a man remember but his lines,
> He should not touch at any serious point,
> But he might breathe his spirit out of him.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> His learning savours not the school-like gloss,
> That most consists in echoing words and terms,

And soonest wins a man an empty name;
Nor any long or far-fetch'd circumstance
Wrapp'd in the curious generalties of arts;
But a direct and analytic sum
Of all the worth and first effects of arts.
And for his poesy, 'tis so ramm'd with life,
That it shall gather strength of life with being,
And live hereafter more admir'd than now.

In his verses to the memory of his friend, published with the first edition of his works in 1623, he exalts Shakespeare above the English dramatists, whom it was certainly not difficult to excel; he wishes moreover to call 'thundering Aeschylus,' Euripides, Sophocles, and the Roman dramatists to life, 'to heare his Buskin tread, and shake a stage,' for when 'his Sockes were on,' no one 'of all that insolent Greece or haughtie Rome sent forth,' or who since 'did from their ashes come,' could compare to him. 'Triumph, my Britaine,' he continues:

thou hast one to showe,
To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.
He was not of an age, but for all time!
And all the Muses still were in their prime,
When like Apollo he came forth to warme
Our eares, or like a Mercury to charme!
Nature herselfe was proud of his designes,
And ioy'd to weare the dressing of his lines!
Which were so richly spun and wouen so fit,
As since, she will vouchsafe no other wit.
The merry Greek, tart Aristophanes,
Neat Terence, witty Plautus, now not please;
But antiquated, and deserted lye,
As they were not of Nature's family.
Yet must I not giue Nature all: Thy Art,
My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.
For though the Poet's matter Nature be,
His Art doth giue the fashion . . .
. . . . . .
For a good Poet's made, as well as borne.
And such wert thou. Looke, how the father's fa
Liues in his issue, euen so, the race
Of Shakespeare's minde and manners brightly shi
In his well-torned and true-filed lines;
In each of which he seemes to shake a Lance,
As brandish't at the eyes of Ignorance.
Sweet Swan of Auon: what a sight it were,
To see thee in our waters yet appeare,
And make those flights upon the bankes of Thame
That so did take Eliza and our James!

But stay, I see thee in the Hemisphere
Aduanc'd, and made a Constellation there!
Shine forth, thou Starre of Poets, and with rage,
Or influence, chide or cheere the drooping Stage;
Which, since thy flight fro' hence, hath mourn'd like night,
And despaires day, but for thy Volumes light.

How came it then—I repeat the question—that this Poet, whose worth was not unknown to himself, nor to the penetration of the discerning, nor to the instinct of the masses in his own time, should have been almost forgotten a few years after his death, and for more than a century should have been wholly misunderstood?—The following is the solution of this enigma.

The favour which the poet enjoyed could in his life have been in no wise universal, because his art itself was a contemned profession. The spirit of the austerely moral religious age was in large circles of society hostilely opposed to the luxurious worldly works of the stage. Serious natures also in the literary world ridiculed compassionately the activity of the frivolous stage-poets who hoped for immortality from their iambics; the jealous among them attacked the art as a public scandal and corruption. Like the chivalric epic poets of the fourteenth century, many of the dramatic poets (like Greene and Gosson) repented in later years of their former profane writings, implored their friends to leave the sinful art, and ended by writing on religious subjects as an atonement for the past. The warmest defenders of the drama must have themselves confessed that it was a matter needing support. The clergy, the magistrates, and the municipality, steadily opposed all theatrical matters. Thus the dramatic art in England had at the period of its highest excellence to protect itself against the threatenings and persecutions of active, important, and dreaded adversaries. The dramatic art was indeed often enriching in a high degree to the poet and actor; but as in almost all times, and at that time to a much greater extent than now, it was infected with a moral stain. On the spot, where the alluring attraction of the art was direct and immediate, the poet was elevated for the moment by the ensnaring charm; outside the doors, where the marvel had not been seen, he was disregarded and unknown.

But this was not the only thing which caused at this time the name and calling of a poet to be held in disrepute. Matters

were not so prosperous with writers of that day as with our own German poets of the last century, who appeared at a time when political life lay fallow, when no opposing or rival activity produced a disturbing and diverting influence, when the literary movement absorbed the entire life of the people and outweighed every other interest. With Shakespeare's time we may date the true beginning of English greatness; the religious energy of the people, the art and knowledge peculiar to the genius of the nation, and the commencement of the future political and maritime power of England, lie like a bud of rich promise within the period of Elizabeth's reign. With surprising rapidity arose the spirit of enterprise, the commerce, and the industry of the Island kingdom; foreign policy received a great and national basis by the Protestant movement against Spanish and Romish principles; the destruction of the Invincible Armada (1588), destined by Spain for the conquest of England, and the bold contests by sea, producing at the time a race of great sea-heroes, decided the political superiority of little England over the world-wide monarchy of Spain; after Elizabeth's death Scotland was united to England, and then began the first prosperous colonial undertakings (1606), by which the outward power of the kingdom was extended and the internal obstacles to commerce removed. In this young political activity, in this freshly animated national feeling, literature could only form a part, and that part small and obscure, in the great march of excited popular life, and only a small share of that divided interest was directed to the literature of the drama. Thus it was that two men of the first literary rank, namely such a philosopher as Francis Bacon, and such a poet as Shakespeare, if not absolutely overlooked in that much excited period, were by no means universally known, and that they themselves gave probably but little attention to their several works. The fame of poets such as Ariosto and Tasso, Racine and Molière, Goethe and Schiller, passed quickly over the whole European world; of Shakespeare, no one abroad had heard in the seventeenth century, and even the evidence of his fame at home is sought out in later times with difficulty and toil. Thus the mere notoriety of the poet had to struggle at the very first with the whole weight of unfavourable circumstances; an understanding of his works was still less possible. His plays were only written for representation; those who did not see them never knew them; it was with the dramatist

as with the actor, whose sad lot it is that his art cannot be made permanent, as it passes away with the moment. The plays were not designed for reading; their appearance in print was for the most part fraudulently obtained, and was regarded as an injury to the stage, which was the proprietor of the manuscript, and moreover as prejudicial to the renown of the poet, who not rarely invented his scenes (as Marston says of his own) 'only to be spoken and not to be read.' Thus only the half of Shakespeare's dramas were printed during his life, and not a single one under his superintendence and revision. Not till seven years after his death did his works, collected by his fellow-actors, appear in a folio edition (1623), of uncertain and unwarranted value; the older quarto editions of single plays (inveighed against, it is true) appeared in this with all their senseless faults by the side of the newly-added, and equally carelessly revised pieces. This edition was re-published in 1632. At that time the plays of the poet were still held in popular honour; but already a Fletcher had surpassed the master in the favour of the over-excited stage public; and with the characteristic lack at that period of all criticism in English literature, there were no reviewers who might have discerned the pre-eminence of Shakespeare's works, and might have demonstrated the grounds of their superiority. Not long afterwards the whole stage was swept away by the altered current of the national life.

In 1642 began the civil religious wars in England, and in the same year all theatres in England were closed; austerely religious, puritanic zeal, conquered at length in its long struggle with the profane stage, and tolerated no longer its unhallowed works. The same fate befell English literature after Shakespeare's time that had befallen it in the fifteenth century after Chaucer's: the civil wars had so convulsed the nation and its civilization, that no refuge for it remained. Twenty years of bloodshed, and a complete revolution of public and private life, almost effaced the remembrance of Shakespeare's literary epoch. When at the Restoration, under Charles II. and James II., with the court diversions and a gayer life, the stage was also revived, the characters of the Shakesperian pieces became, it is true, again the test of theatrical skill; and the taste of the Saxon people returned even now with a predilection for their favourite, which seemed to the learned of the day as blameworthy as it was inexplicable; but the strong, riotous interest

in the stage that had existed in Shakespeare's time seized the multitude no more; the theatre was formed after the frivolous and light taste of the court, and was no longer susceptible of those great and earnest works. French literature speedily began to rule the world; the taste for antique and stiff rules of art was in direct opposition to the popular character, and to the free spirit of the works of Shakespeare. This taste reached its highest point of contrast in the poetical productions of an Addison and Pope, and in the criticism of Thomas Rymer, who ascribed to an ape more taste and knowledge of nature than Shakespeare possessed, and pretended to find often more meaning, expression, and humanity, in the neighing of a horse and in the growling of a mastiff, than in Shakespeare's tragical flights. When, in 1709, Nicholas Rowe undertook an edition of Shakespeare's works, and attempted to sketch his life from tradition, he found that scarcely anything was known of such a wonderful man; that even the originals of his writings were hardly preserved, and that all that could be gathered of his life was a couple of unvouched-for anecdotes, which even at the present day the most diligent inquiry has only been able to replace by a few authentic facts. From the Restoration until Garrick's time, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, many of Shakespeare's plays were indeed performed, but they were in general most unworthily disfigured. At this time he was read and valued by Milton, the greatest poet whom England since Shakespeare has possessed, a man whose single appreciation might have been of more importance to our dramatist than that of 'the million.' He declared that in the 'deep impression' of his 'Delphic lines' he had sepulchred himself in such pomp, 'that kings, for such a tomb, would wish to die;' and yet even he regarded him only as the child of an unbridled fancy, as a sweet singer of 'native wood-notes wild.'

When, in the eighteenth century, literature stepped in advance of politics and religion, England began, with the revival of the older literature, to resuscitate Shakespeare's also. The re-awakening interest in his works, and the slowly increasing estimation of his value, is first perceived by a long series of editions. From Rowe's first attempt in 1709 to produce a corrected reprint, there has appeared every ten years at least a new edition of Shakespeare's works; Pope's in 1725, Theobald's in 1733, Hanmer's in 1744, Warburton's in 1747, and Capell's in 1768; besides Johnson's in 1765; which with the addition of

various readings and explanations, and under the united efforts of Steevens in 1766, Malone 1790, Reed 1793, Chalmers 1811, and Boswell 1821, has more and more opened the way for the understanding of the poet. For the estimation indeed of his intellectual merit and artistic value, these works offered little that is useful; all the earlier among them, up to Steevens and Malone, were written under the tyranny of the French taste and the most haughty disregard and depreciation of the poet. The oracle of this taste was Voltaire. In his youth, after his residence in England, he had indeed himself proudly introduced Shakespeare into France; impelled by him he had written Brutus in 1730, he had praised the English stage on account of its abundance of action, and had timidly imitated some of its freedoms. But when, from the first French translation, analyses and elaborations of Shakespeare's plays by Delaplace and Ducis began to spread abroad the fame of the British poet; when the criticism of Arnaud and Mercier ventured indeed to attack the classical style; when Letourneur, in his translation of Shakespeare in 1776, exalted the barbarous poet even above Corneille and Racine; then Voltaire's early favour was turned into the bitterest enmity. In the dissertation upon tragedy in the presence of Semiramis, he gave his opinion that Nature had blended in Shakespeare all that is most great and elevating with all the basest qualities that belong to barbarousness without genius; he called Hamlet a rude play, which would not be endured even by the lowest mob in France and Italy; he ventured to say that it was the fruit of the imagination of an intoxicated savage! Thus æsthetic narrow-mindedness judged of the greatest phenomenon of modern poetry; but it was the judgment of an oracle. How should the commentators advance further, who had in themselves much less poetry than even Voltaire, amongst whom the acute Warburton declared, speaking of Shakespeare, that he had only looked through *this kind of writers* in his younger days, to refresh himself after more grave employments? Thus it was easy for those who regarded the general judgments of these interpreters to ridicule their pedantic siftings, their æsthetic fancies, their paltry corrections, and their assumed superiority over the poet; and our Romanticists in Germany scornfully despised them. This was neither due nor honourable. These editors received the poet's works as something totally foreign to them in language, habits, and circumstances; the later among them

since Johnson, have with their unwearied investigation of numerous and worthless sources, rendered the poet readable and enjoyable in language and matter; by suitable explanations they have transformed obscure passages into beauties, and by ingenious conjectures they have converted single deformities of language into true and, even here and there, elevated poetry. These laborious works first discovered to the nation the hidden treasures of the poet; the givers and receivers were earnest in seeking to understand the subject-matter of the poet which was so indispensable to the spiritual perception of his writings, and without which those German critics and translators would have been debarred even from acquaintance with their favourite. For the inner understanding of the poet, these editions of his works have, as I have said, offered little that was useful; that little was limited to isolated, psychological, and æsthetic remarks. In Warburton, in Johnson, and in Steevens (the most intelligent of all), there are excellent explanations of certain passages, traits, and characters, which burst forth amid prejudices and false judgment, as proofs of how the greatness of the poet prevailed more and more even over the narrow minds of these criticisers. But, like Voltaire and most of the French critics, they held fast their prejudices, without feeling how absurd it was to believe that in one man the extreme of coarseness could be united in glaring contrast with the greatest sublimity; even a Villemain (in his essay on Shakespeare in 1839) could in one breath speak of the rude and barbarous genius, and of his unattainable tenderness in the treatment of female character. In accordance with this partial investigation, and with these passing flashes of perception, alternating with greater darkness, was the treatment of Shakespeare on the stage, both in Germany and England. The jubilee two hundred years after Shakespeare's birth, celebrated in Stratford in 1764, denotes about the time when the poet's works were revived by Garrick upon the English stage. Then women urged for his monument in Westminster, clubs were formed for the performance of his plays, and Garrick promoted the study of his characters. He banished all the stiff pomposity of the French drama, all straining for effect, and all preposterous representation; and reinstated in their rights nature, simplicity, and genuine humour. Annually he produced about eighteen of Shakespeare's plays, and endeavoured to purify them from past disfigurement. But all that we know of the histrionic

concerns of this period sufficiently shows that only single actors conceived the idea of single parts; of a play as a whole, as Shakespeare must have conceived it, there was no idea. Thus Schroeder, in Germany, attained to a wonderful height of success in the representation of Shakespeare's characters, but he too stood alone. It is said that an actress, who played the part of Goneril with him in King Lear, was so agitated by Lear's curse, that she would never again set foot upon the stage; the anecdote does all honour to Schroeder's playing, but it may be conjectured that the actress was far from sharing his art. Thus slowly, and by the aid of commentators, an understanding of isolated passages and poetic beauties was obtained; through actors and through a series of writings upon the leading figures of the Shakespeare dramas, an understanding of single characters and psychological truths was arrived at, but the whole of the poet and of each of his single works remained an enigma. The alterations of Shakespeare's plays by Garrick and Schroeder furnishes evidence in itself, only too plainly, that these judges were themselves far from a just perception of them. Nevertheless, this was the especial period of the revival of Shakespeare in England; it was at the same time the period of his first introduction into Germany. For the clear perception and estimation of Shakespeare, as well as for the ripening of our own germinating dramatic art, this was of equally decided importance.

The man who first valued Shakespeare according to his full desert was indisputably Lessing. One single passage, where, in his 'Dramaturgie,' he speaks of Romeo and Juliet, shows plainly that he apprehended his plays in their innermost nature, and this with the same unbiassed mind with which the poet wrote them. With all the force of a true taste, he pointed to Wieland's translation of the English dramatist, when scarcely any one in Germany knew him. Not long before Shakespeare had been seriously compared amongst us with Gryphius, now Lessing appeared and discovered in the great tragic poet an accordance with the highest pretensions of Aristotle. The English editors and expositors of his works were yet under the Gallic yoke, when Lessing cast aside the French taste and the opinion of Voltaire, and with one stroke so transformed the age, that *we* now ridiculed the false sublimity of the French drama, as they had formerly laughed at English barbarism. Lessing's recommendation of the English poet was closely followed by

Eschenburg's translation, and a completely altered taste among our young dramatists. A rude counterpoise to the exaggerations of French conventionality appeared for the moment necessary, in order to restore the even balance of judgment. In Goethe's youthful circle in Strasburg they spoke in Shakespeare's puns, jokes, and pleasantries; they wrote in his tone and style; they exhibited all the coarseness and nakedness of nature in contrast to French gloss and varnish, and felt themselves, from identity of character, as much at home with the Germanic nature of Shakespeare as with Hans Sachs. In the camp of these free spirits the cry was for power and nature, and the result was the exaggeration of both in caricature; this appears both in the pictures from Shakespeare's works by the painter Fuseli, and in the poetical imitations of Klinger and Lenz. But this enthusiastic appropriation and devotion, this poetic imitation of the English master, even in the youthful works of Schiller and Goethe, led nevertheless to a totally different and a more spiritual kind of understanding. The distortion and extravagance of their early opinions passed in time from the minds of these men, who as poets and critics were equally prepared to take a wholly different view of the study of Shakespeare to that of the English commentators of old; the poet for the first time stands before us in the unassuming truth of nature. In 'Wilhelm Meister' Goethe produced that characteristic of Hamlet, which is like a key to all works of the poet; here all separate beauties are rejected, and the whole is explained by the whole, and we feel the soul of the outer framework and its animating breath, which created and organised the immortal work. Unfortunately Goethe went no further in explanation of the poet; he thought later, that all was inadequate that could be said about him, although he knew well that he had found the entrance to his innermost shrine. He was, like Voltaire, out of humour, moreover, that Shakespeare should have surpassed him in importance; he had once wished to emulate him; later he felt that the great poet would sink him to the bottom.

Shakespeare rocked the cradle of our newly-born dramatic poetry in the last century, and nursed its youthful efforts. This immense gain from the revived poet could not be acknowledged by Germany with slight recompense. With us the reverse of that which had happened in England in the eighteenth century now ensued. We wrote no critical notes upon the poet; wanting the

materials, we wanted also the vocation for the task. We translated him; and while the English possess a series of editions, we have, from Wieland and Eschenburg to Schlegel and Voss, and even down to the disciples of Tieck and many subsequent stragglers, a number of translations, ever newly issued and ever newly read. If in the English editions the annotations almost concealed the text, these translations gave us for the most part the text without any notes. This has accustomed us to another manner of reading the poet. While the Englishman lingered perhaps over isolated passages, we, on the contrary, destitute of all explanations, read rapidly on; we were careless about parts, and compared to the English reader we lost many separate beauties and ideas, but we enjoyed the whole more fully. For this enjoyment we were chiefly indebted to the translation of A. W. Schlegel, which even Englishmen read with admiration. The archaisms are here erased, the rough words of the period gently modified, yet the whole character is faithfully maintained. The sensibility of the German nature, the flexibility of our language, and the taste and mind of the translator, procure for this work equally great and lasting honour. More than any other effort on behalf of the English poet, this translation has made him our own. Admiration reached a fresh point. And this rather with us than in England. For it is to me beyond a doubt that the criticism of the old English editors, such as that of Courtenay's for example, not long ago, would have been quite impossible with us in Germany, even in one such exception. Old prophecies concerning the poet's future seemed to be accomplished. For truly with us has happened that which Leonard Digges, a contemporary of Shakespeare, wrote of his works. They would keep him young, he declared, for all time; and the day would come when every thing modern would be despised, every thing that was not Shakespeare's would be esteemed an abortion; then every verse in his works would rise anew, and the poet be redeemed from the grave!

However great were the merits of our Romanticists in having arranged Shakespeare's works for our enjoyment, even they have only slightly contributed to the inner understanding after which we seek, and to the unfolding of the human nature of the poet and the general value of his works. In A. W. Schlegel's 'Dramatic Lectures' (1812) the plays are singly discussed. All here testifies to poetic delicacy and sensibility; all is fair, alluring, inspiring—a panegyric of a totally different kind to the criticising

characteristics of the English expositors. But the delineation affords no more than this; no more than the contrast of admiration compared with the former blame; no more than the application of a natural taste to the works of the poet, in opposition to the French prejudices of the former period. Full of suggestion as the work is, it fell far short of satisfying even Schlegel's nearest friends.

The plan which Goethe had designed in 'Wilhelm Meister' was not continued. In 1823 Franz Horn, in five volumes on Shakespeare, diluted the Schlegel characteristics still more. Tickled by that insipid humour which was intended to exhibit the comic power of our Romanticists, he took especial delight in the clowns, and regards the poet, even in his most earnest moods, through a medium of sarcastic ridicule; his unqualified praise, coupled with so much absurdity, is almost an insult. Subsequently Tieck for many years excited our expectation of a comprehensive work on Shakespeare; he gave much evidence of a deep study of the poet and his time, and still further tokens of a secret wisdom and initiation; but the promised whole appeared not, and the fragments which did appear promised nothing.

The great zeal for Shakespeare manifested in German literature reacted in the beginning of this century upon England. When Nathan Drake in 1817 published his ample work upon Shakespeare and his times, the idolatry of the poet had passed already to his native land. An æsthetic study of the poet is little cared for by Drake; his great industry is bestowed upon the delineation of the period; the 'poetic antiquarian' was to be contented; but the work has the merit of having brought together for the first time into a whole the tedious and scattered material of the editions and of the many other valuable labours of Tyrwhitt, Heath, Ritson, Monck Mason, Seymour and Douce, &c. A totally different treatment of the poet had been attempted by Coleridge even before Drake. From 1811 to 1812 he had held lectures upon Shakespeare, so much in Schlegel's mind and manner, that a dispute arose as to the priority of merit of the two æsthetic philosophers. Coleridge's genuine lectures were never printed; only a few fragments are remaining, just to prove to us that he of all Englishmen first measured the poet by a true standard. He declaimed against the French notion that in Shakespeare all was the emanation of a genius unconscious of himself, 'that he grew immortal as it were in his own despite'; he justly contended that his judgment was commensurate with his genius

that he was no wild *lusus naturæ*, and that his so-called 'irregularity' was only the dream of a few pedants.

He advanced the assertion—then a bold one in England—that not merely the splendour of different parts constituted the greatness of Shakespeare, by compensating for the barbarous shapelessness of the whole, but that he considered the æsthetic form of the whole equally admirable with the matter, and the judgment of the great poet not less deserving our wonder than his innate genius. He (and since him Campbell and many other enthusiastic admirers) placed him quite out of comparison with other poets; he declared it an absurdity to prefer him seriously to Racine and Corneille, or to compare him with Spenser and Milton; to his mind he was so exalted above all, that he could only compare him with himself.

A wide-spread interest in Shakespeare and in the literature of his time has been again excited in England of late years. Yet still, as in the last century, this interest most characteristically clings to the matter alone. It would almost seem as if England had especially resigned to her women (Jameson, Griffith, Montagu and others) the task of handling Shakespeare's intellectual side, although this cannot surely be a woman's work. The Percy, Camden, and Shakespeare Societies emulate each other in the publication of rare sources; the works of the poetical contemporaries of Shakespeare have appeared in excellent editions, especially in the hands of Dyce; and since Collier's first debate as to the ground of a new edition of Shakespeare, we may date in England a new period of Shakespeare criticisms, in which no longer cavilling fault-finders, but enlightened admirers, have purified and explained the works of the poet. For a time Collier and Charles Knight maintained the field alone; recently Dyce, Howard Staunton, Singer in a new revision of his careful edition of 1826, and Halliwell with his splendid edition, have formed a more complete cluster; and urged by this animating spirit of emulation, even in Germany, Delius, Tycho Mommsen, F. A. Leo and others, have been carried away by these philological efforts in a manner hardly to be expected from foreigners. Unfortunately with this eagerness of the English at the present day is entwined the history of a long-prepared and long-continued literary fraud, which a witty writer has called a new *affaire du Collier*: an extensive web of deceptions, in which not only has the life of Shakespeare been falsified with pleasing inventions, but the text of his works

has been threatened with an invasion of alterations, the dangerous novelty of which awakened the attention of the critic, and rendered his eye so acute that the deception, hardly suspected, was at once discovered and proved.[1] Painful as it is to see the history of Shakespeare's after-life disfigured by this high treason against the crowned head of the English language and literature, perpetrated on this very poet, to whom no human vice was so detestable as falsehood and forgery, I must be allowed to pass over this interlude with this slight mention, since the famous readings of the Bridgewater and Perkins folios, even if they were well authenticated, would hardly have affected my special task, which is only concerned with the general psychological and æsthetic examination of the poet. On this point nothing of importance has occurred in England throughout the period which has witnessed so many new movements and endeavours with regard to Shakespeare.

Thus we ever return, when we seek a model-explanation of Shakespeare's works, to Goethe and his interpretation of Hamlet. Upon this remarkable play the most glaringly opposed opinions have centred; the turning-point of the true appreciation of the poet was to issue from these conflicting views. Voltaire, who had read this piece in order to criticise and make use of it, saw in it only a heap of disconnected and confused scenes. His verdict deserves never to be forgotten. 'Hamlet'—thus he characterizes the drama—'is mad in the second act, and his mistress is so in the third; the prince, feigning to kill a rat, kills the father of his mistress, and the heroine throws herself into the river. They bury her on the stage; the grave-diggers utter quodlibets worthy of them, holding skulls in their hands; prince Hamlet replies to their disgusting follies with coarseness not less disgusting. During this time one of the actors makes the conquest of Poland. Hamlet, his mother, and his step-father, drink together on the stage; they sing at table, they quarrel, they strike, and they kill.' Now arose Goethe, and this same alleged chaos suddenly appeared as an harmonious world full of admirable order. He pointed out one single bond which linked together the apparently disconnected scenes and

[1] I content myself with referring to the works of two paleographs who have decided this matter:—Hamilton, 'An Enquiry into the Genuineness of the MS. Corrections in Mr. S. P. Collier's Annotated Shakespeare,' folio, 1632: London, 1860. Ingleby, 'A Complete View of the Shakespere Controversy:' London, 1861.

characters, one single thought, to which every action and every figure may be traced. Every inconsistency of character finds its explanation, every offending passage its justification, every apparently incidental part or action its necessity, every heterogeneous episode its connection with the whole. The explanation justified that declaration of Coleridge's, that the form and structure of Shakespeare's plays are indeed as worthy of admiration as they had before been decried as barbarous. This result of Goethe's examination was so new and striking, that he felt himself obliged to oppose the traditional opinion; so accustomed was the world to see in Shakespeare only the Muses' untutored child of nature, that it was confounded to be obliged suddenly to seek in his works a systematic, well-digested, and artistic design, which constituted him just as calm and superior a thinker as he had previously been estimated a wild natural genius.

And yet in the interpretation of this play we can go even further than Goethe went, and the work becomes clearer at every step and increases in attraction and depth. And more than this; in almost each of Shakespeare's works the same structure, upon one undeviating plan, is to be shown, as in Hamlet. Not in all in like manner; not in the apprentice-works of his early youth, and not in the same degree in the first fruits of his independent creations as in his riper productions; but throughout gradually from the first it may be seen that Shakespeare instinctively worked out his plays from one single idea, thus preserving their spiritual unity and in a new manner satisfying the severe demands of art made by the oldest æsthetics.

It was to be expected that the example of Goethe's explanation of Hamlet would not be lost. What he did for the single piece it would soon be wished to see carried out for the whole. To make this attempt is my present task. Now that the way has been once indicated, it will be yet oftener done; the effort has been already made; although only in Germany, and even there, scarcely in Goethe's exact meaning. At the prime of the new romantic school, when the British writer forced his way to Italy, when in 1821 and 1822 they strove even again in France after better translations of Shakespeare,[1] when the 'Globe' maintained

[1] Only quite lately a complete and completely true and unvarnished prose translation has been undertaken in France by François Victor Hugo. (1859.)

the Teutonic tendencies of art, when an English theatre in Paris (1827) introduced the poet in perfect form, and young dramatists undertook to follow his flight, Guizot suffered himself to be impelled to a spirited study of Shakespeare (1821, 1858), not however by Goethe, but by Schlegel. Yet he too paused at the controversy of the time, without wishing to decide it; the controversy, namely, as to whether the dramatic system of the Englishman were not better than Voltaire's—a question Lessing had long ago settled. He saw that it was obstinate to deny the art and rule in Shakespeare's plays. Striving to discover it for himself and for others, he was on the track of the rule of their moral unity. He perceived with admiration their structure upon one ruling idea, which referred every part to one and the same aim, and at every step revealed the profundity of the plan as well as the greatness of the execution; but he found this unity of idea in tragedy alone, and not in comedy, where the more concealed it lies, it is only observed with all the greater nicety; moreover he contented himself with having pointed it out generally, without proving it in detail in his analysis, on which all however hinged. In H. N. Hudson's lectures on Shakespeare (1848), this great æsthetic question has been hardly glanced at. Every critic of Shakespeare will highly rejoice at this American's fine appreciation and estimate of the poet on the whole; on the other hand in the development of single characters he is throughout impeded by the absence of individual points of view, and the want of an extensive knowledge of human nature. The reader will above all see with surprise, with respect to the internal structure of the plays, that this critic was not even aware of a moral unity in them; that he overlooked all poetic justice, and saw a kind of moral confusion prevail throughout. If this were just, the attempt to give a more profound explanation of Shakespeare's works would be hardly worth while. The best part of his art would fall to the ground; for if poetry does not exhibit the rule of moral justice, it degrades itself to a lower position than that of genuine history. Among the German interpreters, Ulrici has attempted to tread the path pointed out by Goethe, which I also purpose to pursue.

It must ever be the case that interpreters, occupied with the same predilection upon the same subject, should meet upon many points. Yet it seems to me that our philosophical method of examination is not applicable to the poetry of a period the philosophy of which sought knowledge in a manner totally dif-

ferent to our own; it is not applicable to the works of a poet of honest healthy mind, whose eye and ear were his pilot and steersman through life and the world; who, rich as he was in philosophic profoundness, was still further removed than Goethe from philosophy itself. And just so far should we place philosophy from his poetry; for the effect will ever be discordant, when the barren field of speculation approaches too closely this fresh green of reality.

Shakespeare's works should properly only be explained by representation. For that, and for that alone, were they written. The separation of dramatic poetry from histrionic art, through which both arts have suffered, was unknown in Shakespeare's time. The main difficulty to the understanding of his plays lies thus alone in this, that we read them and do not see them; for full as they are of poetic beauties, of psychological characteristics, of moral worldly wisdom, of references and allusions to the circumstances and persons of the time, they divert attention to the most different points, and place a difficulty in the way of the comprehension and enjoyment of the whole. But when they are performed by actors who are equal to the poet, a division of labour takes place, which, by the interposition of a second art, assists us to the easier enjoyment of the first. Actors who understand their parts relieve us of the trouble we have in reading, of separating perhaps twenty different characters, and understanding them and their mutual relations. The appearance, the words, the behaviour of each actor, explain to us, without effort, as in a picture, the figures and the mainspring of the action; by the finest threads they guide us through the intricacies of the plot, and lead us by an easy way into the most inner and secret part of the artistic structure. The critic therefore who so explains Shakespeare's works that he prepares the actor for the perception of the whole play and of his part, and aids him, as it were, in producing such an intelligent and perfect representation as would afford the true artistic interpretation of the play, that critic would in my opinion be the best exponent of the poet, and would have seized the only method which places no constraint upon his works.

But if the works of Shakespeare were singly explained in this manner, there yet remains another and more difficult task; namely, so to arrange these evidences of the poet's activity, that being brought before us not in systematic combination but in their true succession, they should in their internal connection lead us

again from the scattered variety to one higher common point, to the creative spirit of the poet. Let this genius of the poet be watched in its development, be discerned and traced out in its imperfect embryo, in its growth, and in its finished form, by comparing the abundant contents of his works and the scanty sources concerning his life; let even a faint image be sketched of the mental condition, the personal peculiarity, and circumstances of the great man,—between both, between his inner life and his poetry, let a bridge be thrown with a few speaking touches, and a connection pointed out, which may show that with Shakespeare, as with every rich poetic nature, no outer routine and poetic propriety, but inner experiences and emotions of the mind were the deep springs of his poetry,—then for the first time we should have reached a point which would bring us near the poet; we should gain a complete idea of his personal existence, and obtain a full picture, a living view of his mental stature. And human as we are in our weakness, believing that we possess our gods, only when we have brought them into human form, so we have also the natural desire to know in their personal and human aspect the minds whom we honour in their works. But in this matter almost every source is hypothetic and fragmentary in its nature, and it is to be feared that the delineation produced may be rather a poem of the historian than a history of the poet. A similar hazard, however, attends every historical recital. Every historical work of art reflects the mind of the narrator no less than the subject presented; and this only acquires a living reality for the human mind, when it has been received and newly fashioned by the creative power of human genius. The attempt, therefore, may be ventured on, even in the danger of finding in the following narration more fiction than truth.

SHAKESPEARE AT STRATFORD.

In a note to Shakespeare's sonnets, Steevens wrote for our information the following sentence:—'Concerning the poet's circumstances, all that we know with any certainty of Shakespeare is, that he was born in Stratford-on-Avon, married, and had children; that he went to London, where he appeared as an actor, and wrote poems and plays; that he returned to Stratford, made his will, died, and was buried.' If good fortune had not preserved for us the lives of all poets—at which Thomas Heywood, a prolific poet, a contemporary and acquaintance of Shakespeare, worked for more than twenty years—all further curiosity on the subject would most probably be left unsatisfied. For this inadequacy of our knowledge of Shakespeare's outer life we are sometimes consoled with the idea that the history of his mind on the other hand is all the more complete. This is true; but we must at the same time acknowledge that we must notwithstanding seek the necessary starting-point for the history of this mind in the scanty information concerning Shakespeare's life. With this intention we select from the few touches of his outer history only that which could have influenced the inner character and the formation of the poet's mind.

In this matter we shall not too pedantically disdain to take into consideration suppositions which, from the uncertainty that surrounds them, can only be regarded as possible and probable; for even a mere supposition, though it casts but a doubtful twilight upon the history of Shakespeare's development, is for our purpose far more important than the most certain statements as to his goods and chattels, upon which in England so much industry has been bestowed.

The Shakespeare family, ever since the fourteenth century, had spread and multiplied in Warwickshire. It was not originally

established in Stratford-on-Avon, the birth-place of William Shakespeare; the poet's father, John Shakespeare, probably first settled there about 1551. This man, in the city records, was once termed a glover; but we find him afterwards also designated as a yeoman, and occupied with agricultural pursuits; and again other doubtful, although old traditions, make him a wool-stapler or a butcher; all of which can be easily combined if we think of him as a small proprietor, who endeavoured to turn his produce in corn, cattle, wool, and leather to account as a local merchant. John's father, Richard Shakespeare of Snitterfield, near Stratford, the grandfather of our poet, seems to have been a tenant of Robert Arden, of Wilmecote.

A union between the two families was formed by John Shakespeare, who in 1557 married Maria, the youngest of Robert Arden's seven daughters, a year after her father's death. The Ardens were one of the most considerable and most opulent Warwick families; we know that they rivalled the Dudleys, at the period that Leicester stood at the height of his power; the marriage was thus an evidence of John Shakespeare's position, and intimates that he must have been in good circumstances—prosperous, if not rich. This is confirmed by other evidence. In the year 1564 we have the opportunity of comparing his charitable contributions with those of other inhabitants of Stratford, and these place him in the second rank in the corporation. He was the owner of several houses, and in the city records he appears gradually rising in rank and importance, as juryman, constable, chamberlain, alderman, and at last (from Michaelmas 1568 to Michaelmas 1569), as bailiff of Stratford, the highest place in the corporation.

John Shakespeare lived till 1601, his wife till 1608; both lived to see the success and prosperity of their much-famed son. William Shakespeare was baptized on the 26th April 1564; many biographers are pleased to give credence to an utterly uncertain tradition, that he was born on the 23rd April, the day on which he also died. Of the eight children of John Shakespeare, four sons and four daughters, he was the eldest son. He survived the plague which burst out soon after his birth; Providence preserved him; several of the other children died early; one brother, Edmund, was subsequently an actor with him at the same theatre.

There was in Stratford a free grammar-school, where the sons of all members of the corporation were educated gratui-

tously. Here William Shakespeare must have learned the rudiments of the classical languages, which at that time were far more cultivated than now. We shall seize this first opportunity to touch briefly in this place on the much-disputed point of Shakespeare's education and acquirements. According to an unproved tradition in Rowe's life of Shakespeare, the father of our poet, being in needy circumstances, was under the necessity of withdrawing his son prematurely from school, and he is said to have then become a schoolmaster in the country. Two other reports at the end of the seventeenth century, one of which comes from the lips of a parish-clerk at Stratford, 80 years of age, relate that William learned the butcher trade of his father. All three communications intimate an interruption and deficiency in the poet's education, in which we readily believe, however much we may admire the self-instruction with which he subsequently must have compensated for it. In the days of his first successes, Shakespeare, in one of his sonnets, in depicting a wide gap, employs the image of the distance between learning and his 'rude ignorance;' and a true scholar like Ben Jonson might say of him, in the consciousness of his own learning, that he had possessed 'small Latin and less Greek.' Farmer has thus unnecessarily taken the trouble to prove that Shakespeare read Plutarch not in Greek, but in the English translation. Alexander Dyce, however, makes a remark upon this, which in fact decides the whole strife concerning the poet's education and knowledge. 'If he could not read Plutarch in the original,' says the reverend critic, 'I will only observe that not a few worthy gentlemen of our day, who have taken their degrees in Oxford or Cambridge, are in the same case.'

To us Germans the nature and condition of Shakespeare's education may be made perfectly clear by one word of comparison. Our Goethe and Schiller appear, compared to Voss, just as Shakespeare does compared to Ben Jonson. They read, they understood their Homer, only in a German translation. But that the one learned to scan from Voss, and the other, at an advanced age of life, consulted Humboldt as to whether he still ought to study Greek, affords no conclusion as to their whole intellectual training. Just as little can Shakespeare's small amount of Greek witness against the cultivation of his mind, or even against the extent of his information. We may rather venture to say, that Shakespeare had in his time few equals in the range of his manifold knowledge. How too, in this respect, have the

opinions of the present day changed from those of an earlier date! The commentators of the last century, on account of a few historical, geographical and chronological errors, looked down upon the ignorant poet with an air of superiority. Now, however, whole volumes are written to prove his knowledge of true and fabulous natural history, to evidence his familiarity with the Bible, to establish his agreement with Aristotle, and to make him one and the same person as the philosopher Bacon! Now a legal authority like Lord Campbell ('Shakespeare's Legal Acquirements Considered,' 1859) has seriously examined a former conjecture, which even contemporaries seem to have shared; namely that Shakespeare, before his transition to the stage, had been employed in the office of an attorney; and although the severe judge, owing to the want of satisfying proofs, declares the inference drawn from such a partial representation of the poet's knowledge of law to be as venturesome as inferring his education at a naval or sporting school on account of his knowledge of hunting and shipping, still even he considers that it would require gifts of no ordinary kind for a man to contract, by mere presence at judicial proceedings or by intercourse with attorneys, that fluency and technical accuracy of expression, and those allusions to law matters and forms, which are so striking in Shakespeare's works. Armitage Brown moreover concluded, from the poet's Italian knowledge, that he must have travelled in Italy! And if we will not assume, as most decidedly contrary to the principles of the moral character of our poet, that he took great pains to affect a knowledge of the Latin, French, Italian, and even Spanish languages, we must confess that he has shown greater acquaintance with these languages than is acquired in mere pastime. With respect to his classical learning, it has been rightly alleged, in behalf of his more 'fundamental knowledge of Latin, that he used single words of this language in the genuine original signification which they have lost with their adoption into English. Any one who chose to gather together proofs of his extensive reading, would find a wide and vast field of literature with which the poet was familiar; and while we discover matter for criticism in his knowledge of history and geography, we must not forget that at that time chronicles were the only histories of which he knew, and that geography was rarely a subject for study. Yet if we were to believe that Shakespeare's wanton anachronisms in the Midsummer Night's Dream or in the Winter's Tale arose from

pure ignorance, we should be committing the same absurdity as that English critic who condemned Goethe seriously for the superstition with which, in the beginning of his autobiography, he has discussed the constellations at his birth.

Let us return to the history of the poet's youth. Little to be relied on has reached our knowledge, but sufficient to allow us to guess that his earliest experiences must have planted in his mind an abundance of deep impressions which may have subsequently become rich sources for his poetic creations. A course of misfortunes befell him and his house at the period when passion, sensibility, and imagination are strongest in men: he had to eat the bitter bread of tribulation and to pass through the deep water of sorrow—that school of great minds and powerful characters. From his fourteenth year the old prosperity of his father's house was broken up; a stroke of misfortune befell his mother's family, the Ardens; his own indiscretion and self-created distress followed; and thus we see that he had not only to experience a season of adversity, but also one of indignity, which developed side by side his good and bad qualities. We will singly pass in review the main facts.

From 1578, when William was fourteen years old, the affairs of the father, John Shakespeare, declined. He was obliged in this and the year following to mortgage an estate (Ashbies) in Wilmecote, and shortly after to sell his wife's share in other possessions in Snitterfield; moreover we find, that in the years 1578–9 he was exempted from all poor rates and other public contributions. From the last year, being 'warned,' he ceased to attend the halls, and on this account in 1586 he was superseded by another in his position as alderman, apparently without his own wish or consent in the matter. Just about this time we find, as the return to a distringas, that there was nothing to seize; and soon afterwards we find him degraded even to imprisonment for debt. In the year 1592 his name appears in the report of a commission, which had to take note of those who did not come monthly to church, according to royal command; and the memorandum is subjoined, that John Shakespeare 'coome not to churche for feare of processe for debte.' In the documents which relate to these domestic circumstances, he is now always designated as a 'yeoman.' Perhaps he had given up his retail trade for agricultural pursuits, and had thus fallen into difficulties. From all this it may be in-

ferred, and we find it subsequently confirmed, that the children were early thrown upon themselves and their own resources.

A misfortune of another kind befell his mother's family, the Ardens, when our poet was in his nineteenth year. The head of this family was Edward Arden, of Park Hall. The jealousy of the two Warwick houses of Arden and Dudley has been slightly referred to before. It was deadly between this Edward Arden and the notorious Earl of Leicester, a character so familiar to all readers of Schiller's 'Maria Stuart' and Walter Scott's 'Kenilworth.' When Leicester in the year 1575, in the famous festivities at Kenilworth, entertained and wooed Queen Elizabeth, he was carrying on at the time a criminal intercourse with the Countess of Essex, whom he married after the death of her husband in 1576. Even before she was his wife, Edward Arden had uttered harsh expressions to Leicester with regard to this intercourse which his power and insolence kept concealed from the court and queen; possibly this may have happened during the festivities at Kenilworth, and Leicester's connexion may thus have been made known to the queen, who ended her sojourn at the castle of Kenilworth by sudden departure. These reproaches excited in Leicester an irreconcilable hatred towards Arden. He entangled him in a charge of high treason, and Edward was executed in the year 1583.

However, apart from the impoverished Shakespeares, the leading branches of the Arden family may have stood, it is easy to understand that this fall would be deeply felt by the former. The circumstances exhibit both families in decline and misfortune; the hard lines of life's discipline may have been stamped by them on the mind of the young poet. These circumstances may have been healthful for the formation of his character, for at the same time we discover traits of a youthful levity to which these grave family events were well fitted to act as a counterbalance.

It was to Nicholas Rowe, who in 1709 wrote a life of our poet, that the actor Betterton related the oft-told anecdote of Shakespeare's deer-stealing, which he had heard at Stratford. He had fallen, so the story goes, into bad company, and had taken part in some deer-stealing at Charlcote, the property of Sir Thomas Lucy; he had been prosecuted by Sir Thomas, and had revenged himself with a satirical ballad, a stanza of which is elsewhere preserved; this had redoubled the persecution against him to such a degree, that he was obliged to leave Stratford

and go to London. What warrant there is for this story, what genuineness belongs to the preserved stanza of the ballad upon Sir Thomas Lucy, we cannot say. Country people near Stratford to this day point out indeed to strangers a statue of Diana with the hind, which they exhibit as the poacher Shakespeare; and if Betterton's authority were of this kind, the anecdote would certainly be very suspicious. An external confirmation of it, however, is indeed strongly indicated in the introductory scene of the Merry Wives of Windsor. The poet is thought to have here immortalized that story of his youth, transferring his deer-stealing to Falstaff, and ridiculing in the person of the proud Robert Shallow, to whom he assigned a shield with twelve luces, Sir Thomas Lucy himself, whose arms bore actually three; and in the same manner the Welsh priest pronouncing the English word luces as lowsie, the wit of the stanza of the ballad,[1] which is still extant, turns entirely upon this dialectic perversion of the name Lucy.

But apart from these circumstantial proofs, the anecdote carries with it decided marks of a most characteristic trait. In the domain of literature and art, as little as in that of politics, can rapid and great changes in these branches of the cultivation of a people take place, without producing an anarchical transition state, and this is generally exhibited most strikingly in the irregular and strong-minded characters through whom these changes are effected. The men who were instrumental in a complete revolution in our German dramatic poetry, Wagner and Lenz, and indeed those greater ones also, who more speedily rose to moral dignity and honour—Klinger, Goethe and Schiller—appear in their youth to have been the prey of the same strong passions, the same Titan-like naturo, and the same disregard of conventional habits and restraints, as they depicted in their early poems. The case is similar with the dramatists, who revived the English stage in Shakespeare's time; only that the few traits which we possess of them are, according to the character of the age, far more

[1] A parliament member, a justice of peace,
At home a poor scarecrowe, at London an asse—
If lowsie is Lucy as some volke miscall it,
Then Lucy is lowsie, whatever befall it.
He thinks himself great,
Yet an asse in his state
We allow by his ears but with asses to mate.

coarsely drawn. The names of Marlowe and Greene, in connection with Shakespeare, correspond in the English drama to the place which those youthful friends of Goethe occupy in Germany, in the manner of their poetry, in their envious literary jealousy, and in their whole moral bearings. Marlowe, both by word and writing, is said to have depreciated and scorned at religion; satirical poems call him a swearer and blasphemer, an associate of all who reject the law of God; his poetical contemporaries deplored that his wit, bestowed by heaven, consorted with vices born of hell. Robert Greene was a decayed clergyman, and died, it is said, of immoderate wine-drinking; his violent opponent, Doctor Gabriel Harvey, laid to his charge the most scandalous life, and appealed for confirmation of it to the general cognisance of the city of London; even Greene himself spoke at last of his works as follies in a tone of repentance, which does not testify to a happy conscience. It was also known of Peele, Thomas Nash, and Lodge, that they led an unruly unsteady life, persisting in no regular industry; all except the last died early, and Marlowe by violence. In the fashion of these wildlings, Shakespeare's youthful habits may likewise have begun; it is not improbable that in the bad company which Rowe describes, he may have led the life which he subsequently depicts so strikingly in Henry IV. His deer-stealing may easily have been the most innocent part of his life. The age regarded this careless existence, such as tavern-life, robbing of gardens and dancing round the May-pole—the oftblamed, though never discontinued customs of the young—rather as wantonness than as crime; just as we designate the peculations of the school-boy by a forbearing expression (*schiessen*, to shoot), which almost reminds one of poaching. There are, however, other and as it seems indisputable testimonies existing, which prove the young Shakespeare to have been also addicted to dissolute habits of a different character.

We might indeed already infer these habits from a series of Shakespeare's poems, at the close of his collection of sonnets; poems which, with just as much unvarnished morality as candour, declare the poet's connection with a married woman, who shared a faithless love between him and one of his friends. The English have endeavoured in every possible manner to dispute the prosaic truth of the subject of these poems, and thus their moral conclusions. The æsthetic infallibility of the poet was of less moment to them, than that as a man their favourite

should be a faultless saint. It is a trait which does just as much honour to the moral feeling of the nation as it is prejudicial to their investigating sense of truth, and perhaps even to their estimate of human nature. 'For why,' says Boaden, in his writings on Shakespeare's sonnets, 'why should we be so jealous of making the poet such a spotless creature as the world never saw! a being who so immeasurably surpasses us in mental gifts, and who may not betray his race by the slightest moral fault? True, when repented error seduces not to imitation, it is better to stifle our presumption, whilst we show the greatest amongst us by no means stainless.' At any rate we cannot do justice to the mind of the poet himself, who valued simple truth above everything, unless, in gathering together the characteristics of his life, we make him no better than he has represented himself.

Shakespeare married, in his nineteenth year, Anne Hathaway, a young woman seven or eight years older than himself, the daughter of a wealthy freeholder at Shottery near Stratford. Whether consideration for the necessitous circumstances of the family, or the rashness of a violent passion, urged to this early marriage, we know not. The young couple married in the end of November 1582, and had a daughter Susanna baptized as early as May 26, 1583. From this circumstance Collier infers the latter cause, and perceives in it the main reason for the small degree of happiness which, according to these accounts, characterised Shakespeare's married life. Others of Shakespeare's biographers have contradicted this consequence, asserting that instances of such early births after marriage were at that time abundant, because the betrothal was regarded as the consummation of the marriage; but this custom itself would witness rather to the moral license of the age than to the moral restraint of the couple, who—exceptionally, of course—delighted in its freedoms; the sorry conclusions which we draw from these evil auspices with regard to Shakespeare's domestic condition, would not be weakened by this plea. For Shakespeare's married life was undoubtedly no happy one. His wife brought him twins after two years, and they had no more children. When he soon after settled in London, he continued, for some time at any rate, his free life; and this we do not merely gather from the sonnets; no regard to a dear wife and a happy family circle appeared to restrain him. As Robert Greene kept his wife in Lincolnshire, Shakespeare also left his

behind him at Stratford; he liked her better as the watcher over his economical circumstances at home, than as witness of his fame in the capital. He saw her again in his regular annual visits to Stratford, whither he returned while yet full of vigour; but this was rather the proof of his sincere disinclination to the 'public life' of the theatre, than a heartfelt inclination for domestic life with his wife. In his will he only sparingly and meanly bequeathed to her his second-best bed. In an economical and business point of view, we might indeed clear this strange legacy from the reproach of neglect, for the widow of a freeholder was entitled by the law of the land to her dowry; but as regards the social relations of the couple, one sad token will ever remain, that the testator in his last will, in which he devotes a little remembrance to so many even non-relatives, mentioned none of the Hathaways, and leaves not a word of love for his wife. We have, therefore, indeed some reason to give credit to the bitter experiences of Shakespeare's married life; and we may be pardoned if, in searching through his works, we fancy we meet with direct outbursts of feeling upon this portion of his history. Were the circumstances which accompanied his marriage the 'fore-bemoaned moan' upon which the poet looked back repentantly in his sonnets? Was it accident, that just in his earlier dramas the pictures of bad imperious women, such as he never subsequently depicted, filled his fancy? that in Henry VI., when he re-touched it, he gave such double force to the traits of character with which he had endowed the terrible wives of the King and Gloster, as if to unburden his own heavy heart? With how much true conviction, as out of self-drawn experience, he utters the warning in 'Twelfth Night.' (II. 4.)

> Let the woman take
> An elder than herself; so wears she to him,
> So sways she level in her husband's heart.

And with what sorrowful confession does he add the reason why this proportion is the more natural one—a reason which reflects little honour on the man:

> For, however we do praise ourselves,
> Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
> More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,
> Than women's are.

To Shakespeare's settlement in London we shall return presently. He continued there, as we have said, his dissipated

life; at any rate, two anecdotes are told which, if they are to be relied on, would prove it. On his journeys to and from London, wrote Aubrey about 1680, he would often put up at the crown at Oxford with John Davenant. He and his wife were fond of him; he stood godfather to their son William, and the evil world inferred more than friendship between the beautiful and witty Mrs. Davenant and the poet. One day the little William ran quickly home, and being asked why he ran so, he replied, he wanted to see his godfather. 'You are a good boy,' said the interrogator, 'but you must not needlessly use God's name.' The young William Davenant subsequently made much of his acquaintance and relationship with Shakespeare, so that he has even been given the credit of having invented this story. Another is told by a contemporary of the name of Manningham, about 1602, during the lifetime of the poet. The wife of a London citizen, carried away with admiration for Shakespeare's friend, Richard Burbage, when acting as Richard III., invited him one evening to her house, and told him to knock at the door under the name of Richard III. William Shakespeare heard the invitation, and knowing the word, anticipates his friend. Soon after his appearance a second Richard III. is announced. But the wanton possessor of the fair lady's company sends back his friend: William the Conqueror goes before Richard III.

These anecdotes may indeed seem mere inventions; the first may be truly only the application of a current witticism to the poet; historical legends often arise in this manner as retrospective conclusions from authentic facts. Because Shakespeare was a poet, we might say, the report originated that he killed his father's calves in 'a high style' and made a speech at the time; because he was acquainted with hunting and horses, some make him a poacher, others a horseboy. So also that story of roguish wooing may well have been imputed to the poet of the famous love-scene between Venus and Adonis. But as it is related by a contemporary, this seems less probable. Besides, we do not readily impute such inventions to a character which is considered honest and sober. Added to this, a poetical counterpart, as it were, to the last anecdote is to be found in those evil-esteemed sonnets, of which we spoke before.

The poet depicts in those sonnets (127–152) the singular woman with whom he exchanged a sinful affection; he describes her as ugly, black in complexion, hair, and eyes, considered

beautiful by none, and with no charm for any physical sense. That which drew her to him was her music, her intellectual grace, and an aptness which clothed the ugly with beauty and raised in his eyes 'the worst in her above all best.' In vain he struggled against this passion, in vain he called to aid his reason, and even his hate. For she ensnared his much-loved young friend, whom the remaining sonnets extol; but even this perfidy he forgave her, which seems to have been rather an act of wantonness, for the passion was not returned; so that it must be admitted we are looking upon a flippant and thus upon no tender intercourse between two lovers, such as the above-mentioned anecdote between Burbage and Shakespeare would lead us to presume.

It was an unrestrained life that Shakespeare led in his youthful years; in addition to his poaching and his love adventures, there appears his resolve to separate himself from his family and to become an actor; a step at that time taken readily by no one who did not set universal opinion at defiance. He himself recognises in his sonnets the 'disgrace' and 'blots' that clung to him; he confesses that he was continually renewing his 'old offences of affections!' Had he not drunk so deeply of the cup of passion, he would scarcely have depicted with those master-touches the power of sensuous courses, he would scarcely have pictured with such fervour and depth the charm of their allurement and the curse that lies in their excess. Had he not once crossed the threshold of crime, how could he so accurately and profoundly have penetrated into its most innermost recesses? Man issues from the hand of nature, endowed for good or for bad, and unfortunately predominant propensities have ever the hardest struggle. If the man comes out of the conflict victorious, he bears away with him a spoil which without the conflict had been unattainable; the moderation to which he returns is found by none who have not stumbled against extremes. The period in which Shakespeare lived was one in which natural and sensual powers were strongly developed, but these were counterbalanced by religious habit, by tenderness of conscience, and by much intellectual vigour. As the age, so was the poet himself. He exulted when young in his physical energies, and spoke of himself in his early years as old, when he began to obey the dictates of his reason, and to follow out his intellectual impulses. Just as Goethe and Schiller early withdrew from the dissolute habits of their

youth and youthful associates, so did Shakespeare: he consorted with his contemporaries Marlowe and Green at first as his equals, but he knew them, as his Prince Henry knew the wild company which pleased his youthful inclination, and he discarded these habits like the prince, when he was called to better things. We shall subsequently endeavour to discover, from his personal poems, when this inner reformation in him took place. But if we may venture to gather the condition of his mind from the poems, written at different times in the paroxysm of passion, we should say that he, like Goethe, although in different combination, possessed that happy nature which is endowed with moderation and self-command even in moments of passion, and with a degree of composure even in the midst of tumult. Thus we shall see, in the next chapter, that in the two descriptive poems which we possess from his pen, the firstlings of his Muse, he gives early proof of this peculiar double nature. Both poems in form and matter correspond to this early period of unrestrained passion, and originated in it. But the one, full of stoic severity, exhibits the victory of mind and morals; presenting a contrast to the other, which, full of tender charm, depicts the base rule of the senses. The picture of the struggle between mind and sensuality, between reason and desire, as it must have shattered the poet himself, is still more distinctly delineated in the sonnets which are addressed to that unbeauteous charmer; in all of them he chides his easily befooled senses, and the conquered spirit scorns the conqueror Lust, without being able to raise itself from its defeat. The 129th of his sonnets expresses this frame of mind in the most striking manner:

> The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
> Is lust in action; and till action, lust
> Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
> Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust,
> Enjoyed no sooner, but despised straight,
> Past reason hunted, and no sooner had
> Past reason hated, as a swallow'd bait,
> On purpose laid to make the taker mad;
> Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;
> Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
> A bliss in proof—and proved, a very woe;
> Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.
> All this the world well knows; yet none knows well
> To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

SHAKESPEARE'S DESCRIPTIVE POEMS.

Of the two narrative or rather descriptive poems which we possess of Shakespeare, the one (Venus and Adonis) was first printed in the year 1593, the other (Lucrece) in 1594. Both are dedicated to the Earl of Southampton. The poet himself, in his dedication, calls Venus and Adonis his first work, but Lucrece belongs indisputably to the same period. Both poems were certainly revised at publication. Their first conception may place them at a period previous to Shakespeare's settlement in London. Everything betrays that they were written in the first passion of youth.

We at once perceive how completely in matter and treatment they are interwoven with the youthful circumstances and moods of the poet, at which we have hastily glanced. The subject of Venus and Adonis is the goddess of love wooing the cold yet insensible boy, and her laments upon his sudden death. In the first part the poet has endowed the wooer with all the charms of persuasion, beauty, and passionate vehemence; with all the arts of flattery, entreaty, reproach, tears, and violence; and in so doing he appears a Crœsus in poetic ideas, thoughts, and images, a master and victor in the matter of love, a giant in passion and sensual power. From this point of view, the whole piece is one brilliant error, such as young poets so readily commit: immoderate sensual fervour mistaken for poetry. Yet in the opinion of the time this poem alone placed Shakespeare in the rank of admired poets. The very point we mention gave the poem at once its attractive power. All that had at that time been read in similar mythological poems by English and Italian writers, upon the nature and effects of love, were elaborate imaginative works, more brilliant in words than profound in truth of feeling. But here love

appeared as a 'spirit, all compact of fire,' a real paroxysm and passion defying all the artificial bombast of delineation. Thus, by its truth to nature, the poem had a realistic effect beyond any similar mythological and allegorical pictures. Like Goethe's Werther, it was proverbially held as the model of a love-poem; it was frequently reprinted, and called forth a series of imitations; and poets praised it as 'the quintessence of love,' as a talisman and pattern for lovers, from which might be learned the art of successful wooing.

Glowing as are the colours with which Shakespeare has portrayed this passion, his delight in the subject of his picture has never betrayed him into exclusive sensuality. He knows that he is sketching, not the image of human love in which mind and soul have their ennobling share, but the image of a purely sensual desire, which, purely animal, like 'an empty eagle,' feeds on its prey. In the passage where he depicts the wooing of Adonis' horse which had broken loose from its rein, his intention is evidently to compare the animal passion in the episode with that of the goddess, not in opposition but in juxtaposition. Rebukingly Adonis tells the loving goddess that she should not call that love, which even he, the poet, names careless lust, 'beating reason back, forgetting shame's pure blush, and honour's wrack.' This purer thought, which more than once occurs in the poem, is yet, it must be admitted, half concealed by the grace of the style and by the poet's lingering on sensual descriptions.

In Lucrece, on the contrary, this purer thought lies in the subject itself, which seems intentionally to be selected as a counterpart to the first poem; in opposition to the blindly idolised passion, the poet places the chastity of the matron, in whom strength of will and morality triumph in a tragic form over the conquest of lust. The delineation of the seduction scene in Lucrece is neither more modest nor more cold; it might even appear that in the colouring of the chaste beauty there lay still more alluring warmth than in any passage of Venus and Adonis. Yet the repentance and atonement of the heroine, the vengeance of her unstained soul, and her death; all these are treated in a totally different manner, in a more elevated tone and with corresponding emphasis. The poet indeed significantly leaves the narrower limits of the description of a single scene, and gives the situation of the heroine a great historical background. The solitary Lucrece, whilst she con-

templates suicide, stands in meditation before a picture of the destruction of Troy, and the reader is led to observe the similar fate which the fall of Lucrece brought upon the Tarquinians and the rape of Helen upon the family of Priam. If the poet in Venus and Adonis, led on by the tender heart of Ovid, was absorbed in presenting a merely voluptuous picture which would have been a fitter subject for the painter, we see him here assuming a higher standard of morality, and, evidently incited by Virgil, casting a glance towards that field of great and important actions in which he afterwards became so eminent. To exhibit such contrasts was a necessity of Shakespeare's versatile mind; they are a characteristic of his nature and his poetry; they appear here in the first beginnings of his art, and recur incessantly throughout all his dramatic works. Our own Goethe delighted in the repetition of one favourite form of character, which he reproduced only slightly changed in Weisslingen and Werther, in Clavigo, Ferdinand, and Egmont; this would have been impossible with Shakespeare. It lay in his nature to work out a given subject to that degree of perfection and completeness which renders a recurrence to it difficult, and rather invites to a path with a directly opposite aim.

To those who only know Shakespeare through his dramas, these two poems present in their structure a totally foreign aspect. Whilst in the dramas, with their conversational form, everything tends to action, in the narrative form of these poems everything lies in words. Even where an opportunity occurs, all action is avoided; in Venus and Adonis not even the boar's hunt is recounted; in Lucrece the eventful cause and consequence of the one described scene is scarcely mentioned; in the description of the situation itself all is lost in rhetoric. *Before* his deed, Tarquin in a lengthy reflection holds 'disputation 'tween frozen conscience and hot burning will;' *after it*, Lucrece in endless soliloquy inveighs against Tarquin, night, opportunity, and time, and loses herself in vague reflections as to her suicide. Measured by the standard of nature that marks the other works of the poet, this would be the height of unnaturalness in a woman of modest retirement and cold will. That which in Shakespeare's dramas so wonderfully distinguishes his soliloquies, namely the art of expressing infinite feelings by a few grand touches, is not here exhibited. Only two small indications of it do we meet with in Lucrece, the places where

she questions the maid upon Tarquin's departure, and asks for 'paper, ink, and pen,' although they are near her; and where she sends away the groom, who blushes from bashfulness—but, as *she* believes—'to see her shame;' in these passages the psychological poet, such as we know him, glances forth. Everywhere, besides, in this more important of the two poems, his representation of Lucrece suffers from an inner lack of truth, and shares the faulty structure of the Italian pastoral poetry. Its distinctive characteristic are those so-called conceits, strange and startling ideas and images, profound thoughts lavished on shallow subjects, sophistry and artificial wit in the place of poetry, imagination directed to logical contrasts, acute distinctions, and epigrammatic points. The poet here works after a pattern which he surpasses in redundancy; he takes a false track with his accustomed superiority; he tries an artistic mannerism, and carries it beyond its originators. He carries it to a height at which he himself, as it were, becomes conscious of the extravagant excess, of the strange alternation of sublimity and flatness, which is peculiar to this style. This impression is made by the passage in which Lucrece writes the letter to her husband and passes her criticisms upon it:

> This is too curious-good, this blunt and ill:
> Much like a press of people at a door
> Throng her inventions, which shall go before.

In one of his earliest comedies, Love's Labour Lost, Shakespeare repudiates this kind of style. There, in the person of Biron, while he designates most excellently the peculiarities of this kind of poetry, he bids farewell to the

> Taffata phrases, silken terms precise,
> Three-pil'd hyperboles, spruce affection,
> Figures pedantical: these summer-flies
> Have blown me full of maggot ostentation.

And, indeed, it was just in the amatory style, to which these peculiarities especially belonged, that Shakespeare first and for ever discarded them; and whilst no poetry was ever so decidedly conventional as this conceit-poetry of the Italian school, none is more opposed to this conventionality than that of Shakespeare's dramas. In many passages of his works, something of the false glitter of the art yet remains; in many parts he used it purposely for some definite aim. In his tragic pathos, especially, he has been reproached with degenerating into pomposity

and bombast. And it is certain that he sincerely delighted in the grandiloquence of Seneca and in the glowing style of Virgil. The admiration of the account of Pyrrhus' death, which he places in the lips of such a judge as Hamlet, leaves us no doubt of it. Lucrece bears the same character of diction in many parts. No German can read this poem without being reminded of Schiller's attempt to translate Virgil into stanzas. The delight of young students in the Roman master was similar, and proceeded from similar causes: youth receives a greater impression of the heroic from the grandiloquent than from the simple grandeur of Homer; the Latin type of epic art is more readily received than the Greek; thus Goethe cherished a preference for Virgil, until he had read Homer with greater ease in German. It is for this reason that Shakespeare was a Virgilian even in his sympathies; as in Lucrece in the freshness of early impressions, so at a later period he is always on the side of the Trojans in all allusions to the great Homeric myth. We must remember that, according to tradition, the ancient Britons are descended from the Trojans, and that this illustrious pedigree was held in remembrance in dramatic poems; and in one of Shakespeare's last works, Troilus and Cressida, we must keep clearly before us these early youthful feelings, if we would understand the poem.

That a poet of such common sense as Shakespeare should, in the beginning of his career, fall into this over-refinement of art, in which he reminds us of a Marini and a Hoffmannswaldau, is much easier to conceive, than that he could so quickly abandon it in order to point out to all futurity the path of nature. We must remember that the chivalric poetry of the Middle Ages was a conventional art, which in the fifteenth century had degenerated in all parts of western Europe into crudeness and unnaturalness. From this crudeness it was rescued by the far-famed Italian epic poets, who studied in the sixteenth century from the works of the ancients. But the want of nature in the material obtained from the romances of chivalry, could not be overcome; they endeavoured in vain to form a pure work of art out of a basely-chiselled statue. The more rapidly, however, that chivalry and knightly customs declined in the sixteenth century, the more speedily was interest lost in the subject-matter of those Italian masters, such as Ariosto and Tasso; and admiration rested alone on their excellent structure, their harmonious versification, and their refined, courtly language.

Poetry had become subjectless, and the form was now the highest point at which the poet aimed. But when the technical in art becomes the principal thing, the form soon becomes over-refined; and at the same time human nature, the subject and theme of poetry, becomes falsified. Matter and form, the poetical expression as well as the contemplation of human nature, are then fashioned according to an arbitrary law; conventionality, and not nature, dictates the poet's path. The extreme point of this psychological and æsthetical unnaturalness was reached by the allegorical and pastoral poetry of the Spanish and Italian poets of the sixteenth century, which occupied in its full extent the vacant place of the fast vanishing chivalric epos. The pastoral romances of Ribeyro, of Saa de Miranda, Sannazar and Montemayor, ruled the world; the 'Diana' of the last writer was admired, circulated, and enlarged as much as Ariosto's 'Orlando Furioso.' No wonder that this taste now penetrated also into England, where Italian literature had once already, in Chaucer's time, exercised influence, and where the Italian lyric not long before Shakespeare's time had been introduced by Sir Thomas Wyatt and his friend, the noble Earl of Surrey. As Chaucer adopted Boccaccio, and Surrey Petrarca, so Sir Philip Sidney, who died in the year that Shakespeare came to London, introduced pastoral poetry into England; his 'Arcadia' is an equal imitation of Sannazar and Montemayor. Men such as these (Surrey and Sidney) were quite calculated to prepare a new era for poetry in England. It was just the period when the Reformation created a favourable atmosphere for all cultivation, when scholastic philosophy was losing ground in the schools, when antiquity and its literature was revived, and when through the art of printing a general sympathy for all literature had been diffused. Already at the court of Henry VIII. witty amusements, plays and masks, had been made a vehicle for allegory and pastoral poetry; but it was under Elizabeth that the golden age of revived art and knowledge flourished under the fostering hand of a queen who was herself a lover of the fine arts, was learned in language and music, read Greek and Latin authors, and made dilettante attempts in lyric poems. The admired art of the South now streamed towards England, without meeting with any resistance in a national literature; and promoted by a new, cultivated, and art-loving nobility, who since Henry VIII., like the small Italian princes and Spanish

grandees of the sixteenth century, took art and literature under their own protection and peculiar care.

To this class of men—with whom art ennobled life, and life dignified art—belonged that unfortunate Surrey, who in the prime of life fell a sacrifice to the snares of Lord Hertford and the tyranny of Henry VIII. To the same class also belonged the short-lived Wyatt, whom report and even his own poems placed in suspicion of having been too intimate with the royal Anne Boleyn; and Philip Sydney, over whose equally early grave the laments of admiring scholars were poured forth in all tongues. To it also belonged Raleigh, the famous naval hero, who like Surrey died guiltless on the scaffold; Lord Vaux, Thomas Sackville, the Earls of Dorset, Oxford, Pembroke and Southampton, the two latter contemporaries of Shakespeare. Poetry cast its light on the life and the character of several of these nobles. Their influence was extraordinary, and their taste ruled the English literature. The sublimity of the Petrarchian lyric, the purity of versification, the courtly refinement of taste after the Italian model, emanated from them; but in its train also followed that unnaturalness and distortion which belonged to their patterns. The favourite of Sidney and Raleigh was Edmund Spenser, whose 'Faerie Queene' delighted men of his own and of a later day by the harmony of its verse and the bright colouring of its poetic pictures. With Surrey arose a multitude of sonnet-writers and Petrarchists, up to the time of Shakespeare. Among their number was Daniel, a protégé of the Earl of Pembroke, whose mother was a sister of Sidney, and herself a poet; Drayton was a favourite of the Earl of Dorset. Their lyric poems bear the character of the Italian style; in the English sonnets of that day—even in Shakespeare's—we are offended everywhere by subtleties, quibbles, and ingenuities, peculiar to that pastoral style of poetry. Many of these poets drew directly from the source of Italian art: Daniel wrote his sonnets in Italy; Rich was the translator of Italian tales; the dramatists Lilly and Greene, and the actor Kempe, who belonged to Shakespeare's company, had been themselves in Italy. Thus it was that England in the sixteenth century was inundated with Italian lyrics, pastorals, allegories, dramas, and tales; that in opposition to the rising drama appeared the declining epic; that a foreign art struggled with a native art, and a learned and aristocratic style with a national taste. It was a cosmopolitan and wide-spread literature, which had for support the

weight of half Europe, the taste and the prejudice of courts, of the refined world, of the learned and the cultivated.

In the midst of these circumstances Shakespeare appeared. How was it possible that he should not have reverenced this taste and this school of art? His non-dramatic works, his sonnets, and the two poems we are considering, place him among the number of those clients of the nobles, those scholars trained in a foreign school, those lyric and epic poets, at whose head stands Edmund Spenser. If we possessed nothing from Shakespeare but these poems, we should rank him among the Draytons, Spensers, and Daniels, and not a doubt would have arisen over the nobility and dignity of his school and education. Both the poems mentioned betray in matter and title the learned Latin school; in their treatment of the old myths and stories, and in the evident traces of the influence of Virgil, they seem to bespeak a poet who was not superficially acquainted with the poetic art of the ancients. A learned and competent contemporary (Meres) said of them, in rapturous praise, that in 'the honey-tongued poet lived the sweet witty soul of Ovid.' But in his sonnets he indisputably attained more of the poetic gloss and depth of thought of the best Italian sonnet-writers than any of his numerous rivals in England. Towards many of those men, and towards several of their noble patrons, he stood in some literary or personal connection. To the Earl of Southampton he dedicated the two poems we have discussed; he must have known Sir Walter Raleigh, for he visited in London the club founded by him in Friday Street. Edmund Spenser, probably a Warwickshire man, was among the first to reverence Shakespeare's genius, whom as early as 1594, after his first tragic attempts, he extols under the pastoral name Aëtion, with an allusion to his warlike name, because his 'Muse, full of high thoughts' invention, doth, like himselfe, heroically sound.' With Daniel's sonnets those of Shakespeare exhibit the greatest inner affinity, and even outwardly the form is imitated of the three stanzas and the concluding couplet; from Daniel's 'Rosamond' Shakespeare borrowed the seven-lined stanza of his Lucrece. Cunningham has discovered in the twenty-first of Shakespeare's sonnets evident allusions to those of Drayton, and comparing the sonnets 80 to 83, it is indisputable that Shakespeare intended by him the 'better spirit' who threatened to deprive him of the favour of the friend and patron to whom his sonnets are addressed. With this Warwickshire man also Shake-

speare may have felt the bond of fellow-citizenship. Everywhere we see him in the closest contact with this school of poetry, in personal association with the nobles who fostered and protected it, in greater or less accordance with its poetic tendency. It is later in his dramas that we first meet with proofs that he had reformed the taste for the southern lyric, and changed it into delight in the homely sincerity of national Saxon song. But by that time he was standing forth in full maturity as the people's poet, who had forsaken the learned and courtly art; as the national poet, who had cast the foreign school into shadow; as the dramatic poet, who had made epic poetry forgotten; as the Shakespeare who had eclipsed Spenser and all his contemporaries.

SHAKESPEARE IN LONDON AND ON THE STAGE.

SHAKESPEARE left his native town of Stratford in the year 1586, or at the latest in 1587. He was then between twenty-two and twenty-three years old. Whether he did so to obtain a better lot for his needy family by the exercise of his talents; or, as one tradition tells us, to escape the prosecution of Sir Thomas Lucy; or as another asserts, out of love for poetry and dramatic art, is not to be determined. Nothing seems more natural than that all three motives co-operated in calling forth the determination so decisive for his future life.

That in a man of this rapid maturity of mind the gift as well as the love of poetry and the drama was early awakened, is a matter of course. Food and nurture for it he found without difficulty in his native town and county. Since 1569—thus from the time of his earliest youth—companies of 'Players' belonging to the Earls of Leicester, Warwick, Worcester, and others, performed almost yearly at Stratford, in the course of their travels through the kingdom. But what might have still more prompted Shakespeare's resolve to become an actor, was the fact that several of the players, with whom he was afterwards acquainted, came originally from Warwickshire. One (Thomas Greene) of the Earl of Leicester's company was from Stratford itself; Heminge, the friend of Shakespeare and the editor of his works; Slye, Tooly, and probably also Thomas Pope, were from the same county. James Burbage, the builder of the Blackfriars Theatre, left this county for London—a man, who in the history of the English drama, has the significance of our own Koch, Ackerman, and similarly enterprising talents in Germany; and his famous son Richard was the literary confidant of Shakespeare. How easily may he not thus have early formed a connection with one or other of these

men; how easily may not his poetic talent even in Stratford have excited their attention, and even there opened the way to the early fame and rapid success which followed immediately on his bold resolve to settle in the capital.

We must here interrupt our account of Shakespeare's life and literary career, in order to learn the circumstances by which he was surrounded in London on his entrance upon his new calling. As briefly as possible, that we may not leave the poet too long, we will show when and how dramatic poetry was developed in England, how the stage arose and progressed, in what state Shakespeare found both the poetic and histrionic art, how the company which he entered stood in relation to other dramatic concerns, and what position he himself at first and afterwards occupied in the same.

DRAMATIC POETRY BEFORE SHAKESPEARE.

It is far from our intention to treat the history of the English drama before Shakespeare in a comprehensive manner. Even with the greatest prolixity it would afford no clear picture to the German reader, because all history of literature suffers from the disadvantage of being intelligible only when the main sources are studied side by side with it, and this in the present case cannot be demanded from the German public. We will therefore only consider dramatic poetry before Shakespeare from the one point of view; namely, what it afforded to our poet, what his dramatic art owes to the poetry of earlier times, and could or must have borrowed from it. In so doing we shall perceive that only in the most general sense, but in this to a great extent, could he have obtained anything from the past history of the English stage. There was not either before or in his time, a single dramatist of decided value, to whom he could have looked as a model. He learned the profession from numbers of existing plays; essentially his own teacher, he conceived the true idea of the art from the striving efforts of scholars, among whom there was no master. We shall therefore be spared the trouble of burdening our readers with many names; we shall arrange the performances of dramatic art before and during the time of Shakespeare, in distinct

groups, and seek to draw from each the result which mere tradition and habit imposed upon the poet. By this means we shall perceive throughout a connecting link uniting Shakespeare's poetry with those different groups, and while we gain explanations with regard to Shakespeare, a light may thus be cast by the poet, well known as he is to the reader, upon those matters connected with his art which are unknown to him.

The drama has everywhere had a religious origin. As in ancient times it arose from the sacred chorus, so in Christian ages it sprung principally from the Easter festival. The Catholic passion-rites with which Good Friday was celebrated, the representation of the Crucified laid in the grave, and again on Easter Sunday raised for the feast of the Resurrection, were called Mysteries. During the Middle Ages this name was given to the sacred plays which in all parts of Europe formed the commencement of the modern drama; their primitive subject was always the representation of the passion, sufferings, and death of Christ, and their origin thus essentially belonged to those religious rites. Thus in St. Peter's in Rome, at the present day, on Good Friday the history of the Passion taken from the Gospel is sung in recitative in allotted parts, and the performance carries the mind back to the commencement of the later drama. The cloister and the church were therefore the first theatres, priests were the first actors, the first dramatic subject was the Passion. The first dramas were the Mysteries. These representations extended in time over manifold subjects; sometimes a Miracle-play would be performed in honour of the Saints on their feast-days; sometimes, at the greater Christian festivals, such as Whitsuntide and Corpus Christi, a more comprehensive mystery—comprising the mysterious relations of the Creation and the Fall to the life and death of Jesus, combined into one great picture of perhaps 30 to 40 single plays—would unite a series of Old Testament scenes with the representation of the work, sufferings, and death of Christ, into one immense whole, requiring three, four, or even eight days, for its performance. Soon these sacred dramas found their way from the church to the street; from the clergy to the laity; and even to artisans, who would perform a Miracle-play for the feast of their patron saint, or would select separate pageants from the Mysteries, according as their purport referred to their trade. Subsequently actors and jugglers by profession took possession

of these plays; they became, as it were, stationary in London, but they were carried about in the country to all fairs and markets in all towns and villages, up to the time of Shakespeare.

If we consider that these Miracle-plays, undisturbed by every other kind of dramatic art, circulated among the people and took root among them for many hundred years—upheld by the delight of the masses in spectacles, and inwardly supported by their unapproachably sacred material—we augur at once that a habit so long fostered even in its early, rude, and artless beginning, would impose a law on the later drama even at the time of its artistic perfection; a law which the boldest genius would only cast aside, at the risk of frightening away the people whom he sought to attract. The epic character of the modern drama was determined by the early and for a long time exclusive matter of the sacred plays; the historical mode of treatment was enjoined, and the rich fulness of the material was required. The Greek drama arose in juxtaposition to the perfect epic of Homer, and could not have attempted to vie with it in the representation of lengthened, varied, polymythical action. The praise of the ancient drama could be no other than that which Aristotle gave it; with small means it produced the effect of the stately epos. It lay in the skilful contrast of the representation of simple actions and catastrophes. Modern times, on the contrary, when for centuries the elements of the drama remained unformed, had no imposing epos before them; the drama arose out of the gospel-story, and subsequently out of chivalric poems and historical chronicles full of facts and action; nothing, moreover, was to be abridged of the first sacred material of the Bible; not a crumb of this precious food was to be lost; the brief gospel narrative rather demanded amplification. All these sources in their nature, and condition, required the extent of form and the fulness of material which has become the property of the modern drama. This result was already long determined, when Shakespeare began to write. And he most certainly would not have wished to oppose this law, which the age and the nation had created, and which tradition and custom had sanctioned, when even a Lope de Vega, when even in a much more advanced age our own Schiller, had the discernment to perceive, that with an enforced imitation of the classic drama its effective power was destroyed; that every national character has its particular development, every age its

peculiarity, every tradition its right, and that a poet who would render himself worthy of being transmitted to posterity should have a careful regard for this right and for this course of development.

With this species of sacred drama therefore the history of the English stage begins; and until the fifteenth century, when it reached its greatest extent, it had met with no important competitor. About this period a second group of allegorical dramas, which had their origin in the schools, competed with the former and finally took its place. The so-called Moralities, in their original form of an essentially religious nature, bear the same relation to the Mysteries as the mystical allegories of the Middle Ages did to the allegorical interpretations of the poetical harmony of the gospel, which preceded them; the substance of the Christian story, which the Miracle-play represents by delineating events, is treated by them in abstract precepts, and in metaphorical, allegorical, and scenic performances. In the Miracle-plays single allegorical figures took part in the play, such as Death, Truth, Justice, and others; in the Moralities these and other conceptions appear; human feelings, passions, crimes, and virtues are personified; and these form exclusively the acting or rather speaking personages of this lifeless drama. The central point of the Mysteries—the sacrifice of Christ and the redemption from the Fall—is in moral abstraction the struggle between good and evil; and this, in general, is the subject which these abstract pieces, the Moralities, touch upon. The strife of the powers of good and evil for influence over human nature is the uniform theme of the oldest Moralities which have been discovered in England. By degrees the subject of these pieces left the sphere of religion and approached nearer real life. The struggle between the good and evil principle is now rather viewed from the point of universal morality; the doctrine now turns against all worldliness, against all dependence on those outward blessings, which, in opposition to intellectual and moral possessions, appear as emanations from the principle of evil. If the Mysteries were only barren action, containing little infusion of reflection, on the other hand the moral lesson is the beginning, middle, and end of these plays, which without action and motion are drawn out in solemn stiff dialogues between lifeless phantoms. It is as if they seek to open the inner eye and to unfold thought, so that in the external framework of the drama a deep spiritual purport may be deposited. With this

aim they confine themselves to the most spiritual treatment of their spiritual subject; they avoid the attractions of diverting actions; Horace's union of the beautiful and the useful seems to them unnecessary, and they grant poetry the useful alone.

With the same energy as the Miracle-plays with their rich story had accustomed the growing drama to the representation of action, the Moralities, openly exhibiting their didactic character, gave it, by their moral teaching, an ethical tendency. As this style, which continued prevalent in England through the whole of the fifteenth century, lasted till Shakespeare's time and long after him, we can easily imagine how forcibly the necessity of a higher range of thought and a moral tendency in the drama must have impressed itself upon the poets. As long as the drama in England was no profession, dramatic works were therefore regarded and created from a moral point of view.

In that healthful and natural age which had not yet sought to separate morality, mind, and art, the dramatic poets of England were all united in the principle that it was the vocation of the drama to ennoble morals, however frequently a mistaken application and practice might err against the good theory. They hit upon this principle and clung to it from the simplest of all grounds—namely, because the subject of their dramas was action and nothing but action; for actions are not conceivable without ethical conditions, unless they be such as moral philosophy itself calls indifferent actions, and in that case they are much more indifferent to art than to morality. Sir Philip Sidney had already extolled the first English tragedy, 'Ferrex and Porrex,' in Horace's spirit, on account of its representation of the moral in the form of the beautiful. And in Shakespeare's time, men such as Massinger, Ford, Ben Jonson, and Thomas Heywood, expressly and emphatically gave the stage the high vocation of uniting grace with purity of morals, and they justified the works of dramatic art by their ethical aims.[1] Trained

[1] In his 'Apology for Actors' Heywood imputes to Melpomene the following significant words:

> Am I Melpomene, the buskin'd muse,
> That held in awe the tyrants of the world,
> And playde their lives in publick theaters,
> Making them fear to sinne, since fearlesse I
> Prepar'd to wryte their lives in crimson inke,
> And act their shames in eye of all the world?
> Have not I whipt Vice with a scourge of steele,
> Unmaskt stern Murther, sham'd lascivious Lust?

in this spirit of the more serious and severe tendency of the English drama, Shakespeare, elevated far above his companions, and reflecting upon the deepest concerns of human nature and its relations, formed his dramas on that great principle that it is the first and last aim of this art 'to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time its form and pressure;' he pressed forward to that artistic height where one common and spiritual idea rules each of his works, and so pervades it that it invests the visible form of action with an invisible but all-forming, all-animating soul. However infinitely removed from this high point of art were those Mysteries, in which the poetic power was yet too small to suffer the near-lying thought to glance forth from the action, and those Moralities, which, on the other hand, knew not how to clothe the thought with any real bodily action, we can yet understand that the strict one-sided development of these different elements of the drama must have facilitated its future blending and hindered the loss of either of these elements in their union.

The sacredness of the Mysteries, the spirituality of the Moralities, and the ideal loftiness of both, appeared to demand a contrast in the representation of real common life, if the elements of the drama were fully to assimilate. If the higher elements of the drama originated in church and school, this contrast of the comic and burlesque, in its first independent dramatic form, was to originate in the court. Since the courtly art of the Troubadours and Minnesingers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, singers, story-tellers, minstrels, bards, jugglers, and merry-makers had collected round the princely patrons of art. The necessity for intellectual musical entertainment of a reflective or comic nature centred thus in the courts. In rough, warlike times, as in the fourteenth century, these people were thrown more into the background; in more peaceful times, as in

> Pluct off the visar from grimme Treasons face,
> And made the sunne point at their ugly sinnes?
> Hath not this powerfull hand tam'd fiery rage,
> Kild poysonous Envy with her owne keene darts,
> Choak't up their covetous mouth with moulten gold,
> Burst the vast wombe of eating Gluttony,
> And drownd the drunkards gall in juice of grapes?
> I have showed Pryde his picture on a stage,
> Laid ope the ugly shapes his steele-glasse hid,
> And made him passe thence meekely.

the fifteenth century, they again emerged everywhere. If there had been anywhere in Europe a peaceful refuge where they had found shelter, they wandered again from thence out into the world; for their art, in spite of the difference of language, was a common property. Thus we know that in the fifteenth century German poets carried their art to Denmark and Norway, and Bavarian and Austrian court-minstrels to England. Jugglers, players, court-fools, and singers, thus became the immediate originators and guardians of the love of spectacle, which since the fourteenth century had superseded the more modest delight of listening to the song of the poet. Pleasure in all possible spectacles, in disguises and mummeries, became at this period universal. There was no festivity, no visit to or reception at courts and towns, at which allegorical or historical personages, costly dressed, did not appear in honour of the guests; no great banquet at which a pantomine, a pageant, and tableaux-vivants with shifting scenes, were not represented. Those dumb plays, the Interludes (entremets), came over from France to England as early indeed as Edward III.'s reign. Under Henry VIII. these pageants were more formally exhibited; costly disguises and masks were usual at that time; banquets at court and in private were interrupted by interludes. Thus, in the play of Henry VIII., the poet, following an historical tradition, introduces the king as he and his suite surprise Cardinal Wolsey in a pastoral mask. Allegory predominated in all these amusements; the simple pleasure of disguise led to it, and in pastoral plays, and court-masks of all kinds, it probably arrived at dramatic perfection as early, and indeed earlier, than in the Moralities. Yet it was precisely in the festivities of the court that the drama first cast off allegory, and passed from dead generalities into the details of actual life. One John Heywood—a learned man, originally a player on the spinet, a witty companion and epigrammatist—wrote in 1520 at the court of Henry VIII. a series of interludes, which cast aside allegory, and turned in the most realistic manner to the most ordinary affairs of life, without however repudiating the instructive tendency, but moderating it by jest and irony. The little that is left of this interlude is only upon a somewhat higher scale than the dramatic drolleries of Hans Sachs. There are no exact plays, nor even scenes, which evolve an action, but only comical dialogues and disputes, taken from low and common life, enlivened by droll, rude, and healthful popular wit, and sometimes weari-

some and tedious from unseasonable diffuseness. We know that this Heywood formed a kind of epoch with his comic court-plays; we can therefore easily imagine that similar plays, imitated in the lower stratum of society, among burghers and rustics, would prove infinitely more clumsy. We can readily believe that the spectacle or pageant of the Nine Worthies, which the good Armado performs in Love's Labour Lost, and the 'tedious brief scene' of Pyramus and Thisbe, in the Midsummer Night's Dream, are caricatures, which are not far removed from the actual occurrence. We are told of a Henry Goldingham, who was to represent Arion in a water-play before Queen Elizabeth, and who was to reveal himself in the same way as, in the Midsummer Night's Dream, Bottom proposes to Snug, when he is to act the Lion. Yet how delighted was the age even with trifles!—an age of which that might be said, in a universal sense, which Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Theseus: that it took 'the best in this kind only for shadows; and the worst for no worse, if imagination amend them.' We read the clown's jig at the present day at the conclusion of Twelfth Night, though scarcely knowing what to make of it, a song which the clown had to chant dancing with drum and pipes; but it was with these simple metrical compositions—recited drolleries and farces with comic refrains, solo parts without dialogue—that Tarlton, Elizabeth's court-jester, enchanted the most refined public in London even at a period when the stage was advancing towards perfection. For these farces were performed with that gravity of dry humour which moves the most melancholic, and turns Democritus out of Heraclitus.

No branch of the drama was so early developed in England, from none has Shakespeare received more, and from none has he learned so directly, as from these farces of the jesters of the court and people. Wit and fancy, humour and satire, in the realistic sixteenth century—the coarse nature of which contrasted strongly with the boasted stateliness of the chivalry of the fifteenth—were the common possession of the European world. Men such as Rabelais, Cervantes, Hans Sachs, and Fischart, and the poets of the Italian burlesque, belonged to that period. Numerous popular jesters, the children of a native mother-wit, conveyed this property to the lower classes; and there is a whole world of truth in the observation of Shakespeare, that at this period the toe of the peasant came so near the heel of the courtier, that he galls his kibe. But in no land did this

popular wit appear in such concentrated power and such extensive diffusion as among the Saxon race in England. This characteristic must of necessity be displayed in dramatic art; and thus the clowns—those droll figures of unconscious humour, called in Germany natural fools (natürliche Narren), and whom Shakespeare also distinguished by the name *natural* from the fine court-fools, who with conscious wit lashed at folly—these droll figures were the favourites of the public theatre at that period; and even in our own day the chord is still touched, when in London the Dogberrys and clowns of this sort appear upon the stage. In no branch is Shakespeare more indebted to the past, and in none is he less original than in this; although to us Germans it is just the characteristics of the comic figures and their jests which appear as his most distinguishing peculiarity.

The divisions which we have represented, namely Mysteries, Moralities, and Comic Interludes, and the purely exclusive character of their original nature and form, were not long retained. In many ways they were mingled or joined together; new elements and ingredients, and lower forms of the drama, were added to the two first styles, or were developed out of them. The Mysteries especially, if we consider them in the perfect form which they reached in the fifteenth century, have within them not only the nature of the historical drama and the elements of the Moralities, but their very substance and purport gave rise to the comic interlude and the carnival merry-making. The secular scenes, joined to the history of the Passion, the announcement to the Shepherds, the denial of Peter and others, gave rise to humorous and burlesque treatment, and the Mysteries, like the Easter-feast itself, in the extravagance of Lent and the severe festival of the Easter-week, soon contained in themselves the elements of the comic and the sublime side by side. In the same manner the serious allegoric interlude, whether spoken or merely acted, grew out of the original matter of the Miracle-play. At all times prophetic applications to gospel history were sought for in the stories of the Old Testament; the Mysteries therefore inserted, at opportune passages, in the representation of the history of the Passion, an interlude which treated of the corresponding matter in the Old Testament: thus after the scene of Christ's betrayal through Iscariot, the typical story of the selling of Joseph was introduced in an intermezzo, expressed in few words like the

interlude in Hamlet; or it was represented in a pantomime, a dumb-play or a tableau, as is the case in Pericles and in many secular dramas in Shakespeare's time. And like the Mysteries, the Moralities soon stepped out of their severe original form. As soon as they had emerged from the religious sphere into the moral, it was easy to venture a step further into citizen life. Classes of society now appeared personified; the purport became more and more practical morality and criticism of daily life; satirical allusions to passing events, persons, and circumstances, were added; church and state affairs were dramatised. In the reign of Henry VIII. the Moralities, the now prevailing kind of drama, became, as it were, the receptacle for dramatic composition of every kind. The allegorical figures, the symbolic treatment, and the moral tendency, still held their ground, though the drama of the church and of the schools, both Mysteries and Moralities, more and more gave place to the independent, artistic, and secular drama; the different kinds were blended together; we meet with romantic plays and historical dramas in England, which are full of elements of the Moralities. But where the blending of the different kinds appears most glaring and at the same time most frequent, is in the combination of the vulgar and the burlesque with the sublime and the pathetic. In the midst of the serious matter of those religious plays, and in the solemn dogmatic tone of the moral ones, comic elements had early penetrated. In the French and German Mysteries they were limited to the interludes; in the English, the national element, wherever it was allowable, pervaded the evangelic, but more frequently the Old Testament matter, in the coarsest comic scenes, giving indeed to these sacred pieces that realistic character which remained the distinguishing feature of the English stage. The usual comic character in the Miracle-plays enacted the devil in a ridiculous and terrific form. In the Moralities he usually appears associated with Vice—a figure to which, in not a few passages of Shakespeare's plays, allusions occur, which are for the most part lost in the German translation. Vice here appears as a fool and jester, in a long variegated dress, with wooden dagger, carrying on his sport with men and with his hellish subject. We may remember that this mode of thought, which regarded the principle of evil at once as the type of the ridiculous, and human sinfulness as folly, prevailed throughout Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In this merry age, evil was thus rather exposed to

derision than to repentance. The most serious moral doctrine and the coarsest manner of comic representation went hand in hand. To a certain extent the comic element was ever combined with the peculiar matter and subject of the plays. But even this did not satisfy. The laughter-loving age desired greater stimulant; they inserted merry, humorous jests, fighting scenes, and droll interludes, into the stiff action of the Moralities, which had not the slightest reference to the real subject. This practice was also afterwards transferred to the regular drama, and thus in the first English tragedies the most extravagant jests were intermingled, in no wise in connection with the main action, but merely serving the purpose of exciting laughter. But even this also did not satisfy. The fool was allowed to conclude the play with absurd jigs, to fill up the time between the acts with jests, and to introduce into his part all extravagances of improvisation. Philip Sidney complains in his 'Apology of Poetry' of this unsuitable practice of 'mingling kings and fools, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrusting in the clown by head and shoulders, to play a part in majistical matters with neither decency nor discretion; so as neither the admiration and commiseration, nor right sportfulness, is by their mongrel tragi-comedy obtained.'

This mixture also of various elements Shakespeare unhesitatingly accepted as a legacy of the age: he felt that he could change the passive debts in this inheritance into active stock, and that he could new coin the defects into as many virtues. In his most admired plays—in the Merchant of Venice, in Lear, and Cymbeline—he has developed side by side a twofold action, but by the deep inner union between them he has more than doubled the æsthetic no less than the ethical value of these works. His contemporaries and fellow-dramatists were unable to reach this stage of art-intelligence. The dramas of his whole company, both predecessors and successors, from Lilly to Fletcher, are full of double, even of threefold actions; but it is rather the exception than the rule, if they happen to have reference to each other, and it may be ascribed almost more to chance than to design; even the plays in which unity is regarded are frequently only dramatic scenes without any central dramatic point. As to the practice of intermingling jesting elements in a serious action, the dramatists around Shakespeare knew but little what course to take, even when they regarded it as a bad habit. With almost all, comic scenes insinuated

themselves, without any essential and distinct bearing, into the main action, from which without injury they could be dissevered. With Lilly and Heywood they appear even in antique mythological material. Marlowe suited himself to this taste of the age, although he wished to avoid it; he wrote his 'Tamburlaine' (1586) in the declared intention of carrying his readers from the fancy of jigs and buffoonery to the serious development of an exciting historical and political action. Nevertheless, even against his own inclination, he inserted the usual comic scenes for the people: his publisher afterwards omitted them in the printing of 'Tamburlaine,' because they detracted from so 'honourable and distinguished a history.' Not so was it with Shakespeare. Unrelentingly he banished from the stage the extreme buffoonery of the fools and their unseasonable freedoms. When he mingled the king and the fool, jest and earnestness, tragic and comic parts, he did so on the condition on which even Sidney, the lover of the antique, seemed to approve of it, namely that the matter itself demanded it. He accommodated himself to the popular taste only in the conviction that even to this peculiarity of the rude stage he could give a more refined turn. He developed the character of the fool in the cleverest manner in comedy, but he knew how to use it also for the most tragic effects. He did not disdain the broadest caricature, not however only as a means of exciting laughter, but as a vehicle for conveying the profoundest reflections upon human life. He sketched the most grotesque scenes, but he knew how to link with them the most sublime matter. While his droll conceits appear for the most part jests indulged in for their own sake, a touch of contrast or of necessary characterization combines them ever with the main action of the piece. In the play where the fool and the king are thrown into the closest intercourse (Henry and Falstaff), this connection in itself forms the plot of the piece.

Till the reign of Henry VIII., and even in the early part of that of Elizabeth, the English stage had no special theatre, and no votaries by profession; or if it had, they had no regular duties; there were neither poets nor actors who were exclusively devoted to this one work. But under Henry VIII. the dramatic elements began to collect and form. The first trace of players by profession, who travelled about the kingdom, is to be found in the reign of Henry VI., the first of the English kings who patronised literature, after the warlike race of the Edwards

and Henrys had passed away. In Edward IV.'s reign Henry Bourchier, afterwards Earl of Essex, maintained a company of players; and the cruel Richard III. had, when Duke of Gloucester, a set of actors, of whom it appears doubtful whether they were singers or actors, or both united. But as soon as the national peace was established under Henry VII., there were to be found at court two different organized companies of royal actors; and several nobles—the Dukes of Buckingham, Northumberland, Oxford, Norfolk, Gloucester, and others—had players in their service, who at times performed at court, and travelled under the name and protection of their patrons. Their art was thus diffused through the country, so that soon, even in the larger towns, established companies of actors were to be found. But at the court of Henry VIII. the organization of these artistic entertainments considerably advanced. An ostentatious and cultivated prince, he loved festivities of an intellectual character; and under his rule the germs of the English stage lay in embryo, ready for their full development, which took place with Elizabeth. In the circle of his court there was a distinguished jester (William Sommers), a personage who in England evidently passed direct from the court to the stage; there was a laurelled poet (Skelton), whose works Dyce has edited; there were men and choristers belonging to the royal chapel, who played before him; and from these came that John Heywood who since the year 1590 had been writing the humorous interludes already mentioned. At the same time the companies of the nobles continued playing; masters and scholars from St. Paul's and other schools performed pieces; at Eton, it was usual, at the feast of St. Andrew, to act a Latin or English play; even the students at the courts of law began to produce dramas. Nevertheless all this gave the histrionic art no fixed station as yet, and thus there were still no dramatic poets who had devoted themselves entirely to this branch of art. Under Henry VIII. there were few learned patrons of the fine arts; church disputes distracted the clergy, the nobles had yet scarcely begun to care for the poetic art, and the taste of a Surrey and a Wyatt inclined to the lyric style of Italy. What attraction could they find in the drama in the hands of a Heywood or a Skelton, or in the acting of awkward artisans? From their Petrarch they had derived the highest perceptions of art; but the drama in England was hitherto a rough child of nature without grace, and, as it would seem, without capability of

improvement. What pleasure should men, who considered revived antiquity and ancient mythology as indispensable to poetry, find in the insipid Mysteries? How should they care for the old-fashioned Moralities, when they had read Boccaccio's and Bandello's tales, and Poggio's 'Facetiæ?'

But the *revival of ancient art* soon asserted its influence over English poetry. We have already mentioned that the lyric, allegoric, and pastoral poetry of Italy was here largely diffused; upon the drama also it could not fail to have its effect. The dramatic models of the ancients, and the French and Italian imitations, were known in England; and this fact is indisputably highly important, directing as it did the dramatic art-movement of the age, which was roused by its own power and instinct. As early as 1520, under Henry VIII., a play of Plautus was represented. In Elizabeth's reign, plays by Terence and Euripides appeared among the dramas peformed; the 'Phenician Women' of the latter, under the title of 'Jocasta', was translated by Gascoigne in 1566, the same person who was then conducting the representations of the 'Supposes' from Ariosto at Gray's Inn; about ten years later the 'History of Error' was performed before Elizabeth, probably an elaboration of the 'Menœchmi' of Plautus. Before the 'Jocasta', there had appeared translations and elaborations of Seneca's collected tragedies. The first pieces ('Troades', 'Thyestes' and the furious 'Hercules') were revised and here and there amplified from 1559 to 1561 by Jasper Heywood, the son of John; this was the case also with the pieces which the learned Studley undertook; namely, 'Medea,' 'Agamemnon,' 'Hippolytus' and 'Hercules'; the rest were translated by Alex. Nevyle, Nuce, and Newton; the whole collection, completed as early as 1566, was printed in 1581, shortly before the poetic school, previous to and contemporary with Shakespeare, first made its tragic attempts, and the influence exercised by it is too lightly esteemed. Among the tragedies which were played before Elizabeth after the appearance of these of Seneca from 1568 to 1580, there are eighteen upon classical and mythological subjects; proofs sufficient of the manner in which the knowledge and delight in these matters rapidly gained ground. But far more important than this introduction of classical subjects must have been the influence of the ancient drama in improving the dramatic form and the artistic feeling of the poet. The history of the modern drama proves universally that the poetic nature of nations, however productive may have

been its creative power, had no longer that ripening power of gaining from the drama an enjoyable fruit, without the graft of ancient art. As soon as these highly-praised works of Plautus and Seneca were naturalized in England, it followed as a first result that more highly intellectual minds, and persons of more elevated condition, became interested in dramatic poetry: this in itself would raise the drama from its rough elements into regular treatment and form. This effect appeared almost immediately in tragedy and comedy. At the time when the translations of Seneca were completed, the English possessed already three farces: 'Ralph Roister Doister' (certainly as early as between 1530–40), the subject of which is a gallant wooing the affections of a betrothed lady and his unceremonious rejection; 'Jack Juggler' (1563), in which the personage of this name endeavours to persuade the hero of the piece, that he is not himself, but some one else; and 'Gammer Gurton's Needle' (1566), where the story turns upon a lost needle, the disappearance of which gives the rogue Diccon an occasion for a series of mischievous acts. All three pieces discarded the influence of the earlier styles, the absence of action that marked the interludes of Heywood, and the unnaturalness of the Moralities, the last of the three even rejecting all moralizing tendency; all three refer to Terence and Plautus, and are suggested by Latin comedies. Viewed in comparison with Heywood's interludes, the most extraordinary progress is to be perceived, a progress alone made possible by the contemplation of those ancient models; the gap between them and Heywood's pieces is the same as that in Germany between Frischlin's Latin plays in the spirit of Terence and Hans Sachs' natural dramas. The authors of the first and third of the pieces mentioned are known; Nicholas Udall, the writer of the first, was a learned antiquarian, a master at Eton and the author of other pieces; John Still, the author of the last, was a Master of Arts, Archdeacon of Sudbury, and subsequently Bishop of Bath. A similar position also may be assigned to the first English tragedy, which was suggested by Seneca, and which likewise appeared a few years after Elizabeth ascended the throne. The famous 'Ferrex and Porrex' (or Gorboduc) was first represented in 1561. The piece was composed by one of those patrons of knowledge, one of those sonnetteers among the nobility, Thomas Sackville (Lord Buckhurst and Earl of Dorset), in conjunction with his poetic friend Thomas Norton. It formed an epoch in the

history of the English stage, not so much from its regularity of style and structure, nor from the introduction of iambic verse, as that a man belonging to the upper classes of society should attempt this kind of poetry. From this time the attention of the Sidneys and of all the Mæcenas' among the nobility, whom we have before known as the fosterers of the courtly and learned Italian style, was also fixed upon this branch of art; regular plays were produced in greater numbers, and performed before the art-loving queen. During the thirty years which elapse between her succession to the throne and Shakespeare's appearance in London, we possess the names of a series of fifty-one plays, now for the most part lost, which were performed before her. From the mere titles of these we may infer that the regular drama gained ground more and more, and by degrees attained that point at which we shall find it when Shakespeare undertook its further improvement.

However decidedly the ancient drama had, from the middle of the sixteenth century, begun to form and fashion the formless drama of England, its influence could not extend so far as to annul the habits of four centuries, to erect a learned court stage in the place of the popular theatre, to set aside national subjects and figures, to introduce the antique with chorus and chorus-singers instead of the free unshackled form, and to impose the constraint of the so-called unities of time and place. In the above-named farces, which were intended as imitations of the Latin comedies, there is none indeed of the urbanity of Terence; they throughout exhibit the unconstrained tone and the happy humour of the Saxon people. The tragedy of 'Porrex and Ferrex' places indeed, as in the ancient tragedy, the action behind the scene, and concludes every act with a chorus; still from the allegorical pantomimes which precede the acts, and from an excessively sententious mannerism, it is only too visibly allied to the Moralities; there is no idea of any regard to the unities. We have before mentioned that, previous to 1580, eighteen represented plays are recorded, the matter of which is borrowed from old myths or histories; but all that is preserved to us of this kind shows us what a small share the spirit of the antique had in the conception of the subject, or the form of the antique in the dramatic treatment. We will not refer to a composition so crude as Preston's 'Cambyses,' in whose 'vein' the noble Falstaff enacts King Henry; but even the most educated gentlemen and scholars who were most conversant with

dramatic poetry and belonged to the royal stage, though studying the ancients, exhibited little of the ancient style.

From Richard Edwards, who was esteemed by his contemporaries as a phœnix of the age, we have the 'tragic comedy' of 'Damon and Pythias,' which was intended to have been written according to the rules of Horace. In the relation in which the poet has placed the philosophers Aristippus and Carisophus to the court of Dionysius, we are reminded somewhat of the parasites of the Latin comedies; but the really serious parts are so stiff, that they have nothing in common with the classic school. In the burlesque scenes inserted, Grim, the collier of Croydon—a favourite of the popular English stage—is introduced, and amusements of the lowest taste are depicted, such as cudgellings and wine-drinkings, shaving and pick-pocketing. From 1580 John Lilly (born about 1553) ruled the court stage, until the group of tragic poets around the young Shakespeare cast him into the shade. In a series of dramas of unequal value ('Dramatic Works,' ed. Fairholt, 1858), he laid the foundation of a more refined comedy, which was performed by the children of the Chapel Royal. In his plays the antique lies most characteristically side by side with English manners and matters, in an utterly disunited combination. Among them, 'Mother Bombie' is, as regards subject, a purely popular farce, but at the same time it is designed in the purest style of Terence. The pastoral play 'Galatea' is a Greek legend transported into Lincolnshire, and acted by classically-named shepherds, by the side of whom stand caricatures of the most modern style, alchymists and astrologers. In 'Endymion,' an accurate imitation of Plautus' bully appears in a mythological material, which in the fashionable Italian manner of conceits is manufactured into a flattering glorification of the queen. In 'Midas,' the fables of this Phrygian king are dramatised; in it, however, the English spectators at once saw a satire upon Philip II., the lord of the American Eldorados. In 'Alexander and Campaspe,' all the witty anecdotes and sallies which antiquity heaped upon Alexander and Diogenes are put together as in a Mosaic; but with a perfectly modern ease, lightness, and perspicuity of language, from which Shakespeare learned most directly the prose of his comic scenes. In all these pieces there remains scarcely a touch of antique nature, of the æsthetic sense of form, and of the arranging and sifting spirit of the ancient dramatists. Thus George Whetstone also, the author of 'Promos

and Cassandra' (1578), (the foundation of Shakespeare's Measure for Measure), announces himself as a scholar of the antique, complains of the improbabilities upon which the English dramas are founded, and of the rough way in which they are executed; but his manner in the stiff ten-act piece places him also among the many who at that time saw and commended the better course, and followed the bad. Even the art of much more genuine scholars of antiquity could not break through the nature of a people, nor restrain and divert the poetical remembrances and traditions of the romantic Middle Ages! After those noble poets and their adherents had remodelled lyric and epic poetry in the spirit of the classic restoration in Italy, it was in the highest degree probable that they would make the attempt to refine also the rough popular drama according to the higher conceptions of the ancients. Philip Sidney, in his 'Apology of Poetry' (1587), had energetically appealed to the precepts and examples of ancient art; taking Euripides as his model, he insisted upon the representation of catastrophes, and ridiculed the romantic pieces, which begin an action *ab avo*. Samuel Daniel, whom we have already mentioned as a sonnettist, rested on this honoured authority, and, disgusted by the vain contrivances and coarse follies of the stage, he wrote his 'Cleopatra' in 1594, and subsequently his 'Philotas,' completely in imitation of the Greek tragedy, and strictly observing the unities; Brandon followed him in his 'Octavia' in 1598; Lady Pembroke had preceded him in 1590 with a translation of 'Antonius' by Garnier; and in 1594 the 'Cornelia' of this Frenchman, translated by Kyd, appeared in print. But all these works of a courtly or aristocratic art fell like lost drops in the stream of the popular plays, and perished more decidedly than the similar attempts of our own Stolberg and Schlegel. Who that has seen this pompous declamatory piece of Garnier's, and has compared it with the fresh life of an English original, even of the roughest kind; who that would at all weigh the development of the French stage in comparison with the English, would have wished that these poems should have had a greater influence?—poems which might have diverted the taste of the age from the dramatic laws of the Middle Ages with their thousand years of poetical traditions, and from the poetic mirror of a great present full of mighty capabilities, and might have led it to formal, perhaps faultless works of art, which nevertheless were but a dead exercise of style.

Just as revived art in Italy was not satisfied with imitating

old forms, but incited Petrarch and Ariosto to give a higher artistic character to the spirit and subjects of the traditions of the Middle Ages, so was it also with the drama in England. The epos of the Italian poets, the romances of chivalry, the newly-circulated Greek romances, the national ballads, the countless tales full of exquisite fables and legends from the Middle Ages; all these formed a matter too important to be set aside by the restoration of the ancient drama. The abundance of this material, the delight in its purport, the romantic spirit which had conjured forth in it a thousand beauties and still more exquisite designs, overcame the forms of the classical models, and allowed but little room for the antique material. In the series of dramas which were represented before Elizabeth between 1558 and 1580, we find in addition to the eighteen old historical or mythological plays, a similar number in which the subjects are drawn from chivalric romances and novels. The romantic dramas of this kind presented the most natural and severe contrast to the antique. Some among them manifest in the most simple manner a tendency to the epic form, and very naïvely exhibit the transition from this style to the dramatic. In 'Pericles,' John Gower, from whose epic story the matter is borrowed, is the explainer and arranger of the play; and in Middleton's 'Mayor of Quinborough' Raynulph Higdon performs the part of the chorus and the introducer of the play, the subject of which (Hengist and Horsa) is taken from the Chronicles; a similar exhibitor appears in other pieces of the same kind, where the action is carried on by pantomimes introduced, which require the explanation of these 'presenters.' Plays of this kind pandered to the inclinations of the lower orders, who craved more profuse matter, and would see something for their shilling; they exhibited an utter disregard of time and scene, making the fantastic the rule, in spite of the outrage thus caused to realistic friends of the antique, such as Ben Jonson, and no less so to those idealistic adherents of the antique style who wished to restore the form of the old drama in its entire purity. At the close of the sixteenth century, when Daniel and Brandon had produced their entirely classical models, this taste still prevailed; Shakespeare's Pericles most nearly represents it to the German reader. Just as this piece, hurrying from action to action, from place to place, disregards probability or expressly derides it, so in Thomas Heywood's 'Fair Maid of the West,' a romance full of adventures is made

into two dramas; and of a similar character are his 'Four Prentices of London,' Peele's 'Old Wives' Tale,' Rowley's 'Birth of Merlin,' 'The Thracian Wonder,' alleged to be by Webster and Rowley, and the like. The copious change of facts and scene, the simple treatment and plot, the romantic subject and fabulous spirit of these pieces, made them dear to the people; and Thomas Heywood, when his 'Prentices' was printed in 1615, says expressly, that at the time of its origin this style was customary, though with the more cultivated taste of later years it was abandoned. This accords personally with what Gosson asserts in his work, 'Plays Confuted in Fife Acts' (printed about 1580), as to the sources and nature of those plays which are taken from tales of knight-errantry. He finds, he tells us, that 'The Palace of Pleasure,' 'The Golden Ass,' 'The Æthiopian History,' 'Amadis of France,' and 'The Round Table,' are ransacked to furnish the playhouses of London. The pieces based on these romances he thus characterizes: 'Sometimes you shall see nothing but the adventures of an amorous knight, passing from country to country for the love of his lady, encountering many a terrible monster, made of brown paper; and at his return he is so wonderfully changed that he cannot be known but by some posy in his tablet, or by a broken ring, or a handkerchief, or a piece of cockle-shell.' In a similar manner Sidney, in his 'Apology of Poetry,' depicts the bold treatment of time in these romantic plays: 'Ordinary it is that two young princes fall in love: after many traverses, she is got with child, delivered of a fair boy; he is lost, groweth a man, falleth in love, and is ready to get another child, and all this in two hours' space.' These absurdities, he adds, the most commonplace players in Italy had laid aside.

But for this very reason the Italians have acquired no drama of importance, and still less a Shakespeare. For owing to the small interest felt in antique plays by the few cultivated and distinguished people in Italy and France, no dramatic art could take root as in England, where the interest was based upon the broad foundation of the sympathy of all classes and conditions of the people, inasmuch as it rested on the very ground of popular education, and made use of all the elements and materials which were accessible to the people; and where, as Shakespeare says, the theatre was a mirror, not to reflect the life of a past world, but the life of the present. The efforts for the revival of ancient art and for the recognition of the old

rules of art, in opposition to the confused extravagances of the romantic drama, could not possibly have been unknown to Shakespeare. He could not indeed have been blind to the multitude of dramas around him, into which had penetrated the form of the Latin comedy, the romantic extravagant element of the old domestic Sicilian comedy, as well as the simple domestic element of the Attic. He was certainly acquainted with those pieces of Lilly and Marston, which were directly suggested by Terence; and he must have lived in intercourse with Ben Jonson and Beaumont, Chapman and Heywood, who followed occasionally the track of Plautus. And in his own plays, how often are we not carried back direct to Plautus, now by outward details and scenery, now by the play and banter of words among his wits, and now by a single trait in the delineation of sharp outlines of character, such as among misers, boasters and others. He had thus read the translated plays of Seneca and the Latin comic writers as much as others; in the poetic sea of the old myths and legends he had bathed like a man, who is best acquainted with the element. In Titus Andronicus, if it proceeds from Shakespeare, we shall see how entirely he is at home in this region. In the Comedy of Errors he has worked at a play of Plautus. In the Taming of the Shrew, the 'Supposes' of Ariosto is the foundation—a piece written in the spirit of the Latin comedies. Shakespeare was thoroughly acquainted with the works of Seneca; in his Cymbeline, after the manner of this poet, he makes the presiding divinity appear and speak in the same antique metre in which Heywood and Studley had imitated the Latin tragedist. If Shakespeare had had occasion at any time to name his ideal, and to denote the highest examples of dramatic art which lay before him, he would have named none but Plautus and Seneca! Were these, perhaps, mere external guides? Was this admiration merely a repetition of the much talked-of fame of these poets? Was his comprehension of antiquity not darkened by the spirit of the age? Which, however, of his contemporaries could have apprehended a piece of the old world with such a clear eye as he did the Roman nature in the three histories of Coriolanus, Cæsar, and Antony? We justly distinguish the excellent Chapman, who in the middle of Shakespeare's career translated Homer, and by a bold form of language and faithful adherence to the original might be named a wonder of the age, and whom Pope should have learned from rather than blamed; but let us read Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida,

and ask ourselves whether this wonderful counterfeit imitation of the Homeric heroes were possible to any man who had not grasped thoroughly the substance and spirit of the old epic poets? whether the parody here produced did not demand a totally different understanding of the poet than that required by the translation? whether the caricature in the one case did not betray far more the eye of an artist than the copy in the other? But it is just the independent position towards the father of poetry (which Shakespeare assumes in this play) which proves to us how little this man was formed to bend to any authority, example, or rule, or to reverence exclusively any style. His art was a vessel which afforded a receptacle for all materials in all ages. To reject the fulness of the material, or to condense it for the sake of an obsolete theatrical law, could never occur to him. He appropriated to himself Pericles, and subsequently he wrote the Winter's Tale, a play which would have attracted the ridicule of a Sidney had it not been much later. But, while he treated these subjects, he did not forsake the old rule from ignorance; he did not once in silence pass it over. He knew well that, in the dramatic treatment of an historical subject, the great theme is mutilated by the representation in successive scenes; but this could not induce him, for the sake of this drawback, to yield the essential of which the art was capable. In his Henry V., in five highly poetical prologues, he invites the auditors to transport themselves by the powers of the imagination over these mistreatments of time and scene; and this is the bold manifesto against that rule which it behoved a poet like Shakespeare to make. So also Marston, in a preface to his 'Wonder of Women' (1606), has with hearty good-will given a blow to the defender of the antique rule, declaring that he will not be constrained within the limits of an historian, but will have the extension allowed to a poet. If the Winter's Tale, inasmuch as it combines the history of two generations, is indeed a tale as its title intimates, why should not a tale be brought upon the stage? In the prologue to the second part (4th Act) Shakespeare makes Time speak in dark generalities that which he himself, in the name of his creative art, would significantly enough say respecting the stage-law of unity of time, which he purposely rejects:

> Impute it not a crime,
> To me, or my swift passage, that I slide
> O'er sixteen years, and leave the growth untried

Of that wide pass; since it is in my power
To o'erthrow law and in one self-born hour
To plant and o'erwhelm custom. Let me pass
The same I am, ere ancient'st order was,
Or what is now received: I witness to
The times that brought them in; so shall I do
To the freshest things now reigning: and make stale
The glistering of the present, as my tale
Now seems to it.

The form of an unmeaning law, which is linked to the humour of the taste of the age, could not be more significantly rejected. But it was necessary that, in the stead of this rejected outward law, he should establish an inner and eternal one. How Shakespeare did this, our discussions in the course of this work will show. And at its conclusion we shall find Schiller's remark completely justified, namely, that Shakespeare's new art is perfectly consistent with the true old law of Aristotle; and more than this, that out of it a yet more spiritual law can be deduced than that of Aristotle—a law created for the moulding of a far richer material than that belonging to ancient tragedy, and necessarily arising out of the very nature of the modern drama.

To retain the epic character of the popular drama, but to take from it its deformity and to allow the ancient models to effect a refinement of the form, this was the instinctive tendency and work of the more accomplished poets who, from 1560 till Shakespeare's time, began to give the English drama an artistic character. In this work the superiority of nature over art, which is throughout the characteristic of the northern poetic character, became at once apparent. This *new-birth of the English art-drama* manifests itself in a homogeneous group of tragedies, which from their more concise action and more distinct form are in direct opposition to those vague epic-romantic plays. The plays to which we refer are all severe tragedies, mostly of a bloody character. They are almost all grouped round Marlowe's 'Tamburlaine,' but they are called forth by the remote influence of that first English art-tragedy, the 'Ferrex and Porrex' of Lord Sackville, just as much as that was by Seneca. Those of this group which precede 'Tamburlaine' and are more independent of its influence, approach nearer the classic form; for instance, the tragedy of 'Tancred and Gismunda,' which Robert Wilmot composed with four other pupils of the Temple, and represented in 1558; and the

'Misfortunes of Arthur,' by Thomas Hughes, which was performed in Greenwich in 1587, when the famous Bacon took a part. These plays, like 'Ferrex and Porrex,' shift the action behind the scene, are essentially dialogue and relation, and are tangibly and avowedly ruled by the influence of Seneca. In this respect Marlowe's 'Tamburlaine' is more independent; it appeared in 1586, just as Shakespeare came to London, who thus freshly encountered the immense effects which this piece made upon the stage, and the revolution which it occasioned in dramatic poetry. This play transplanted to the national stage, if not for the first time, yet with greater energy, the iambic blank verse, which allowed the actor all the pathos to which he had been accustomed in the declamation of the older fourteen-syllabled rhymes, but admitted of more nature and motion. The heroic purport of this great double tragedy was announced with solemnity; the high style of the stately action was equalled by the bombastic style of the delivery; the people were to be satiated with a series of battle-pieces; the rhetorical sublimity was to content the more refined guests. The piece fell upon a favourable soil. In the same year (1586) London saw the great tragedy of the cruel execution of Babington and his fellow-conspirators; in the following year fell the head of Mary Stuart, in the next happened the destruction of the Spanish Armada; such tragedies in actual life have ever accompanied stage tragedy, when the reception it has met with has been great and lasting. During these years, therefore, tragedies in Marlowe's style arose in numbers. Kyd's 'Spanish Tragedy' (1588) and 'Jeronimo,' which was added to it by another poet as a first part, shared the fame and the popularity of 'Tamburlaine,' and even surpassed it; Peele's 'Battle of Alcazar,' Greene's 'Alphonso' and 'Orlando Furioso,' Lodge's 'Marius and Sylla;' Nash's 'Dido,' at which Marlowe himself worked; 'Locrine,' which is often regarded as a work of Shakespeare; and Titus Andronicus, which stands among Shakespeare's writings; are all pieces which appeared within a few years after 'Tamburlaine,' and collectively betray a decided affinity of spirit, both as to form and subject. In every respect these plays occupy the same position as our Silesian dramas by Gryphius and Lohenstein. They are similarly written in that exaggerated pathos, and in that grandiloquent and rhetorically pompous style, which is characteristic of the beginner who aspires after mere effect. Unlimited passions are aroused, and their expression is everywhere carried

to exaggeration. Noisy actions and bloody atrocities shake the strong nerves of the spectator; powerful characters are distorted in caricature; in 'Tamburlaine' the struggling tyrants act and treat each other like wild beasts, and even the circumstance which in Marlowe's intention was to ennoble the principal hero, (and which by contrast forms the main effect of the drama), namely, that when satiated with blood he is gentle and peaceable, that the conqueror of the world reverences beauty and is conquered by love, even this proceeds from the animal nature of men. The matter of all these pieces is, upon nearer consideration, much more homogeneous than might be imagined. It turns upon the one point which was also ever the ready theme in the ancient drama, that first and most simple idea of tragedy, namely, the experience that blood demands blood, according to the words of Æschylus: 'for murder, murder—and for deeds, retaliation.' The thought of revenge and retaliation is, therefore, the absorbing one in almost all these plays. It is so even in 'Ferrex and Porrex,' where brother kills brother, and in revenge the mother stabs the murderous son, in consequence of which the nobles of the land exterminate the whole bloody house. In Hughes' 'Arthur,' the house of this king, for the sin of incest, meets with the punishment of fate in the mutual death of father and son. In 'Tamburlaine' this trait appears less forcibly, only that the piece concludes with the dark stroke of destiny which fatally befals Tamburlaine, when he proposes to burn the temple of Mahomed. The catastrophe in 'Locrine' turns upon the vengeance of the repudiated Guendeline towards Locrine and the Scythian queen Estrilde. The 'Spanish Tragedy' and 'Jeronimo' are intrinsically revenge-pieces; in the former, the spirit of the murdered Andrea appears with vengeance as the chorus at the beginning of the piece; the murderer of this Andrea is Balthasar, who has drawn upon himself the vengeance of the betrothed of Andrea, and by the murder of her second lover Horatio has also excited the vengeance of Horatio's father Jeronimo; the spirit of Horatio stimulates the father to the dangerous work of revenge, to accomplish which more surely Jeronimo feigns himself mad, until at last, in a play which he performs with Balthasar and his accomplice, he attains his end. From these hasty glimpses we see that this piece had an influence upon the plan of Hamlet, and still more closely upon Titus Andronicus and the feigned madness of the avenger Titus. This play also is fully imbued with the idea of vengeance. And this

theme especially—the concealment of vengeance or of crime behind dissembled madness or depression—appears to have much occupied the dramatic taste of the day; it is brought into play even in a less tragic piece by Webster and Marston, the 'Malcontent' (1604), in Ford's 'Broken Heart,' and in Webster's 'Vittoria Corombona' (1612). The horrors of vengeance, however, which those Spanish tragedies and Titus Andronicus multiply, are by no means the worst. Chettle's 'Hoffman, or Vengeance for a Father' (1598), exceeds these by far; and in Marlowe's 'Maltese Jew' (1589–90) the hero Barabas exhibits, as it were, the whole hereditary hatred of the Jews compressed into one individual, and the poet invents all imaginable deeds of vengeance, with which the abominably mal-treated Jew vents his smothered rage upon the Christian race.

We mention only this one group of bloody tragedies, in order to characterise the state of things at the time of Shakespeare's arrival in London. A wild, rival activity of rude talents and of rude characters surged around him. The inharmonious and unformed nature of these works reflected the nature of the age and the authors in a faithful daguerreotype. They are the products of a chaotic world of mind, which the whole circumstances of the public life in town and court rendered yet more confused; of a world in which splendour and vulgarity, true love of art and coarse feeling, and a true desire after a higher intellectual existence and the utmost licentiousness of habit, are struggling together. The excess of passion in the characters of these plays is only a copy of that which the life of these poets themselves partly exhibited; the overstrained sentiments and modes of action of their heroes is only an imitation of the overstrained imagination and talent of the poets themselves; the morbid and spasmodic tendencies, the constrained violence and force of the actions, speeches, and men which they represent, is only the copy of the passionate storm exhibited in the life of these Titanic natures, who jolted against the proprieties of life and its barriers, with something of the same coarseness and unrestraint as the youthful associates and poetic friends who gathered round the young Goethe and Schiller. It is a strange circumstance that Marlowe in his dramas attempted the subject of Faust, which suggested itself to many of Goethe's friends, and into which Goethe himself compressed the whole substance of the Titanic period of his youth. If Shakespeare really wrote Titus Andronicus, his early efforts were devoted entirely to the

ruling school; his Pericles may be regarded as representing the style of the epic-romantic dramas, his Henry VI. that of the historical dramas, and his Titus that of the tragedies just alluded to. But whatever great or small share he may have had in these plays, they form the conclusion of this period, and a new one is commenced which must and which can alone bear his name, because no other work even of a later age belongs to it save his own. Such is the cleft that separates the poet from his successors and predecessors, both with regard to æsthetics and ethics. The wild nature, and the untutored feelings of those Marlowe friends and pupils, touched no chord within, even though in the early exuberance of youth the life and actions of his companions may have infected him. If he wrote his Adonis and Lucrece while yet in Stratford, how mild and tender, and how utterly free from the bloody delight of those tragedies, is his treatment of the mournful circumstances delineated in these poems! In his first independent tragedy, in Richard III., the thought of avenging retribution is indeed predominant, but how differently conceived and how magnificently executed! In Romeo and Juliet, the tragic idea is at once introduced in its greatest depth, in a manner that would have appeared inconceivable had not an excellent previous work pointed out the path. In Hamlet, above all, the idea of revenge which so much occupied the poets of Shakespeare's time, is made the very theme of the tragedy; but what a mild light of human morality is cast on the poet by his solution of this theme when he is compared with the rude and abandoned minds of his predecessors! He who knows the relation in which Goethe's 'Tasso' stands to the similar inventions of his unbridled youthful friends, will at once recognise the similar relation existing between Hamlet and works such as the 'Spanish Tragedy;' he will feel that in Shakespeare a softer spirit dwelt, even though in an unsettled mood he might have written Titus Andronicus; he will perceive that this poet, like Goethe, separated himself early and resolutely from the tendency of art and morals prevailing among his early poetic associates. Speedily, therefore, he began in his works to deride this mode of poetry, ridiculing the 'Spanish Tragedy,' in parodising quotations, and placing derisively in the lips of the swaggering Pistol the bombast of 'Tamburlaine' and 'The Battle of Alcazar.' But still more than by these parodies of single passages, the early withdrawal of Shakespeare from the works of subordinate minds and talents is exhibited by

the nature of the first dramas acknowledged as his own. These were comedies and not bloody tragedies; they were comedies of a more refined style, comedies of which England previously had scarcely possessed a trace. Among the many remains of Shakespeare's early efforts, there is no work which shows such refinement as the two first of these independent creations, Love's Labour Lost and the Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Not quite so great as the cleft which separates Shakespeare from his predecessors in tragedy and comedy, is that which divides him from them in history; here the transition is more gentle, because the same comparatively rich sources of Holinshed and other Chronicles were equally at the command of all poets; because the prepared material, borrowed from history and held in patriotic reverence, did not admit of the extravagances to which the dramatists abandoned themselves in their freer subjects, and because sober reality here confined them to one element and thus healthfully counteracted their unrestrained nature. The group of historical dramas from English history, which appeared shortly before and at the same time as Shakespeare's historical plays, consists for this reason of works less attractive and imaginative, perhaps, but still amongst the most creditable, which the English stage at that time produced, and which indisputably must have exercised the most beneficial effect upon the public mind. That these plays are more nearly allied to those of Shakespeare's than all others, arises doubtless from the relation in which these pieces frequently stand to Shakespeare's own poetry, or in which they ought to be placed with regard to it. His Henry VI. is only an appropriation of the works of foreign poets; to the first part Shakespeare added but little; the two last parts are merely remodellings of two extant plays, which by many critics (especially German) are indeed regarded as first sketches by Shakespeare himself, but which proceed undoubtedly from the pen of one of his most qualified predecessors, either Robert Greene, as Collier is inclined to assume, or Marlowe, to whom Dyce awards them. Shakespeare's plays of Henry IV. and V. sprang from an older but very coarse historical drama, which was represented previous to 1588. There is also a Latin Richard III. (before 1583), and an English 'true tragedy of Richard III.' (about 1588), both insignificant works, the latter of which Shakespeare undoubtedly knew, though scarcely in one line has he used it. King John, on the contrary, rests upon a better piece, printed as early as 1591,

which offered much available matter for retention, and therefore has been often regarded as an earlier work of Shakespeare's. Thus Tieck and Schlegel have erroneously declared some historical plays of the burgher class, such as 'Cromwell' and 'John Oldcastle,' to be Shakespeare's works; and Tieck even asserted this with regard to the 'London Prodigal' and an 'Edward III.' which appeared about 1595. This latter piece exhibits a few touches of the Shakespeare dramas, and is embellished with many a skilful ornament of choice construction and rare images; yet it has nothing of Shakespeare's deeper power of invention and delineation of character. Whoever remembers his treatment of the popular favorite Percy, and those few verses in which he makes Edward III. look down smiling upon his lionhearted son from the height in the heat of battle, will not believe that the same poet should have depicted such a faintly drawn Black Prince as that in 'Edward III.' Notwithstanding, the play is the work of a superior mind. And indeed the highest talents emulated each other in this style of writing, which in the last ten years of the sixteenth century may almost be called predominant. Prior to 1590 we have indeed a play, 'Edward I.,' by George Peele, which begins promisingly, but ends without form and with extravagant redundancy of matter. There is an 'Edward II.' (1593), by Marlowe, which being freer from bombast and better arranged as to matter and language than the rest of his works, might have furnished Shakespeare with a direct model. As regards the composition, we find, it is true, in the history of the weak Edward II., surrounded as he is with favourites and rebels, the characters and situations of Richard II. and Henry IV.; but the result is nothing but a chronicle in scenes, not possessing even the sharply drawn characters and the passionate agitation of Henry VI. There is even nothing in this play of the natural freshness exhibited in the popular scenes among the Welsh rebels in Peele's 'Edward I.' And scenes like these are by far the most refreshing part of history, because they present the freest scope and usually the most attractive characters. They stand in the same proportion to the serious parts of history as the ballad does to the chronicle. The heroes, too, of these episodical passages which are less fettered by historical material, such as Robin Hood and the like, have not unfrequently been the heroes of ballads; and personages such as the magician Faust, Peter Fabel, Friar Rush, and Bacon, Collier Grim, and others,

had been popular favourites in living tradition long before they came upon the stage. Robin Hood was brought upon the stage by Munday in two pieces: 'The Earl of Huntingdon' at the close of the sixteenth century; also the 'Magic Contest of John-a-Kent and John-a-Cumber,' in imitation of Robert Greene's 'Bacon and Bungay.' The latter is perhaps also the author of 'The Pinner of Wakefield' (about 1590), in which the robber-hero George Greene is brought into collision with another herculean combatant of the same sort: in such pieces the ballad with its bold touches is rendered suitable for the stage by being merely put into dialogue, just as is the case with the chronicle in the simple historical plays. The hardy popular nature bursts forth here through all bombastic pathos and Italian conceits; it is as faithfully portrayed as in our own rustic poetry and merry tales at the time of the Reformation; the woodland and country scenes in these plays breathe freshness and natural life. More refined and more finished than this 'Pinner' is the 'Merry Devil of Edmonton' (first printed in 1608), which by some is imputed to Drayton, by others to Shakespeare; but in this piece we may rather trace Shakespeare's influence, in the poaching scenes and comic personages contained in it. This is the case also with Thomas Heywood's 'Edward IV.' (about 1600), in the first part of which the old ballad of 'The Tanner of Tamworth' has been excellently treated, and is full of freshness and natural humour. In all these ballad-pieces there is a touch of the free movement and the powerfully described characters of the Shakespeare poetry; there is none of the monotonous diction of the common histories and tragedies; all moralizing and rhetoric is abolished; the poets throw themselves entirely into the situation before them;' the scholar and the writer is overcome, the poet has forgotten himself, he has vanished in the actors and the action; it was here that Shakespeare's art began to assume a new and independent position. And as we before intimated, it is in these histories and ballad-pieces alone that his poetry appears entwined in a closer manner with that of his contemporaries; in all others it presents itself rather as a transplanted nursling, upon which a far nobler fruit has been grafted.

We will add only a few words upon the externals of the style, and the history of the diction and versification of the English drama. The old Mysteries were for the greater part written in rhyming couplets, which consist of short verses in

alternating rhymes; the Moralities were mostly composed in short verses with coupled rhymes. In the more finished plays of Skelton longer rhymes of ten to fifteen syllables appear; these longer lines prevail also with Edwards, Udall, and Still; they are employed by the translators of Seneca. They have been called Alexandrines, though they were meant to imitate the ancient trimeter. The learned authors of 'Ferrex and Porrex' first introduced the rhymeless iambics of five feet, which subsequently became the accepted metre of the modern drama. But at that time the fashion did not prevail; the short blank verse was found more agreeable to the ear, but the rhyme was dispensed with unwillingly. This is, as is well known, frequently apparent here and there in Shakespeare's works also, and especially throughout his earlier pieces. The histories, with their bald and insipid material, helped especially to banish the jingle of rhyme from the stage. Before the troop of the tragedians that circled round Marlowe at about 1586, Gascoigne, in the translation of the 'Supposes' of Ariosto, had given the example of the use of blank verse, and John Lilly introduced it in his comedies and pastorals. He had written a work in 1579 entitled 'Euphues, or the Anatomy of Wit,' in which English taste, it appears, was offended by the application of the extravagant Italian conceits to a non-poetical subject, though it submitted to them in the Italian style of poetry. This style, an accumulation of constrained witticisms and similes, became for a time the fashionable strain of conversation; we find it employed in petitions to the queen and magistrates as well as in poetry; all ladies, it was said, had become Lilly's scholars in this mode of speech, and at the court no one was esteemed who could not converse in the fashion of Lilly's 'Euphuism.' Drayton characterises this style as if its main attribute were the images derived from stars, stones, and plants; that is, from a fabulous natural philosophy; a similar passage from the 'Euphues' was ridiculed by Shakespeare in the comparison of the camomile, which he places in the lips of Falstaff in his royal speech. Still the general character of Lilly's prose, in his dramas, consists only in a superabundance of poetic and witty language, in far-fetched similes and curious images on every occasion, however unsuitable; at the same time his prose, like that of all other conceit-writers, acquires by continual antitheses and epigrammatic allusions, somewhat of a sharpness, piquancy, and logical perspicuity, the worth of which, as regards the development

of the language, was acknowledged with praise by such contemporaries as Webster. From no other of his predecessors has Shakespeare, therefore, especially as regards the dexterous play of words in the merry parts of his comedies and dramas, learned and obtained so much as from Lilly. The witty conversation, the comic demonstrations, the abundance of similes and startling repartees, are here prefigured; his *quibs*, which Lilly himself defines as the short expressions of a sharp wit, with a bitter sense lying in a sweet word, were a school to Shakespeare. But he acted here, as with Marlowe's pathos; he moderated the practice, and used the pattern in its perfect resemblance only for characteristic aims, or for ridicule. In the intercourse between Falstaff and Henry, in the comic affrays of these 'most comparative' wits, Shakespeare has given free course to this vein, as Lilly did without distinction on every occasion. Thus Shakespeare knew how to obtain everywhere a noble metal for his work; the dross he left behind. Similar is his connection with the outward form of the tragedies of the Marlowe school. Marlowe had introduced blank iambics upon the stage with great pomp and energy in his 'Tamburlaine', so that at first a general uproar of envy and ridicule was raised against these 'drumming decasyllabons', and the importance attached to their introduction. Notwithstanding, this metre triumphed so immediately and decidedly, that not alone for the stage in England, but for that in Germany, it remained a law. At first it was adhered to with the utmost pedantic severity and vigour, the verse concluded with the sense, and the sentence with the verse, which had always an iambic termination. Titus Andronicus is thus written. But Shakespeare soon stepped forth from this constraint, in a manner scarcely indicated by Marlowe; he intertwined the sense more freely through the verses according to the degree of passion expressed; and yielding to this inward impulse, he removed the monotonousness of the older blank verse by constantly interrupting its regular course, by abbreviation into verses of one, two, or three feet, by repeated cesures and pauses, by concluding these cesures with amphibrachs, by exchanging the iambic metre with the trochaic, by alternately contracting or extending many-syllabled words, and by combining words and syllables, capable of different scanning. Especially schooled by Spenser's melodious versification, he thus blended its manner with Marlowe's power, and with exquisite tact of sound and feeling he

broke up the stiff severity of the old verse into a freedom which was foreign to his predecessors, and yet in this freedom he retained a moderation which, on the other hand, is partly lost by his successors.[1] His poetic diction, with regard to metrical matters, held the same medium between constraint and freedom as that which he observed with regard to expression, metaphor, and poetical language between the overloading of the Italian conceits and the unimaginative style of the German dramas, which is often, even with Goethe and Schiller, only versified prose.

It is singular that the most important of the young poets around Shakespeare all died early, and soon after Shakespeare began his dramatic career—Peele before 1599, Marlowe 1593, Greene 1592—as if to leave for him a broad and open path. Yet had they lived, he would nevertheless be as unique as he is now. Collier considers that Marlowe would in this case have become a formidable rival to Shakespeare's genius. We are thoroughly convinced that he would have been just as little so as Klinger was to our own Goethe. Indeed, I am even of opinion that if Greene is the original composer of the two last parts of Henry VI., and certainly if he is the author of 'The Pinner of Wakefield,' Marlowe's austere mind and constrained talent would have not even reached to the more versatile, unambiguous, and manysided nature of this man. Shakespeare had not the advantage of Goethe in having a Lessing before him, who with critical mind and well-studied models had broken up a path for dramatic poetry. Unless some lost pieces of greater value, or even one only, kindled a light for him (as we have indeed a hint at least that such was the case, and that he had an excellent dramatic model for Romeo and Juliet), all the dramatic art we find in England previous to Shakespeare is only like a mute way-mark to an unknown end, through a path full of luxuriant underwood and romantic wildness, affording presentiment of the beauty of nature, but never its enjoyment. It was Shakespeare alone who laid open the way and led to a final aim of perfect satisfaction. He surpassed beyond all comparison every single genius around him; the single qualities which one or another fostered with partiality, he united in

[1] We refer anyone who wishes to inform himself more accurately respecting this technical side of Shakespeare's poetry to the unfinished work of Sidney Walker, 'Shakespeare's Versification,' London, 1854; and to the acute treatise of Tycho Mommsen in his edition of 'Romeo and Juliet,' Oldenburg, 1859, p. 109 *et seq.*

moderation and harmony; in the chaotic mass of dramatic productions he first struck the electric spark which was capable of combining the elements. From all the poetic contemporaries around him he could learn, not what to do, but what not to do. And this he must have quickly felt and conceived after those early attempts in which he followed the models round him; for in his first independent works he early adopted an untrodden path, and forthwith gained a height hitherto unattained; the best achievement of his poetic rivals is not to be compared with the least of his early attempts. A man like Chapman, who amid all Shakespeare's poetic contemporaries indisputably approaches in some points nearest to Shakespeare, has somewhere said that *fortune* seemed to govern the stage, and that nobody knew the hidden causes of the strange effects that rise from this hell, or descend from this heaven. Nothing is perhaps more expressive than this sentence as characterizing the dramatic poetry of the day, and as distinguishing Shakespeare's from it; the poets all convey the impression that they are groping in search of an unknown aim, by which they may secure popularity. But Shakespeare began by despising the million; and whilst he strove after the applause of the few, he raised himself to a height which discovered to him at once a nobler law of art and a higher moral aim. Thus it had been a general custom among those poets for two, three, or even five, to work together at one piece; it is the most speaking testimony that all perception of capacity for true works of art was wanting. Shakespeare worked upon ideas, which originated from a thoughtful mind and a deep experience of life; and he could not, therefore, use the hand of a mechanical assistant. In this also he appears unique and perfectly distinct. But if any doubt should be raised at an opinion which separates Shakespeare so widely from his predecessors, and which exhibits him as towering so mightily above them like a giant tree above the brushwood of the soil, it is only necessary to glance at his successors as an evidence that we have dealt fairly with the matter. That his predecessors were left behind him, when all had at first to level the untrodden path, would be in no degree remarkable; but that later contemporaries and successors, who had before them the noble example of his works, and at the time of the highest prosperity of the stage, sustained by every encouragement, that they produced among hundreds of works no single one that in a higher sense even augured the existence of a model like

Shakespeare; this is a fact which proves indisputably how far this man had surpassed the range of sight of those around him. Menander's comedy is not so far removed from the genius of Aristophanes, as the English drama after Shakespeare is from his works. The ethical and æsthetic depth of both is in each case lost, almost without leaving a trace behind. We read through the works of Munday, of Marston and Webster, of Ford and Field, of Massinger and Heywood, of Jonson and Middleton, of Beaumont and Fletcher, and we find an uncommon richness of power and matter prominent in their plays, which often, overladen with three-fold actions, present an inexhaustible mine for the dramatist well acquainted with psychological and theatrical matters; but throughout, the work of the artisan must be refined into the work of the artist. We look upon a mighty industry, rapidly organized upon a great demand, full of clumsy, careless, hasty manufactures paid by the piece, and formed according to the wishes of the multitude; an industry occasionally guided by a publisher such as Munday, who himself indeed made a dozen plays in company with two or three poets. Here everything testifies of sap and vigour in the minds engaged, of life and motion, of luxuriant creative genius, and of ready ability to satisfy a glaring taste with glaring effects; but the forming hand of that master is nowhere to be perceived, who created *his* works according to the demands of the highest ideal of art. Misused freedom and power, disfigured form, distorted truth, stunted greatness—these are everywhere the characteristics of the works of these poets. In the strictest contrast to the French theatre, ridiculing all rules, void of all criticism, and without any power of arrangement, they generally confound a wild heap of ill-connected events of the most opposite character in an exciting confusion of buffoonery and horror, allowing even an action full of abominable depravity to issue in a comedy, and a plot of a conciliating character to terminate in a tragedy; they seek sublimity in extravagance, power in excess, the tragic in the awful; they strain the horrible to insipidity, they give events the loose character of adventures, they pervert motives to whims, they turn characters into caricatures. With Ben Jonson, Shakespeare's witty and cheerful view of life becomes bitter satire, his idealism becomes realism, his florid poetry is turned into prose soberness, his world, charming with its manifold forms of fancy, is exchanged for a lumber-room full of strange requisites, his delineations of

the eternal nature and habits of men is transferred into a representation of ephemeral extravagances, and his typical characters become whimsical humourists. On the other hand, there are countless plays by the less original of the poets of that day, full of direct reminiscences of Shakespeare in the manner of speech and jest, in outward colouring, in designs, situations, and forms of character; but we have only to observe how Massinger exaggerated the character of Iago in his 'Duke of Milan,' or how he christianized Shylock in his work 'A New Way to Pay Old Debts,' or how Ford ('Tis a Pity she's a Whore') transferred the glowing colouring of the love in Romeo and Juliet to an incestuous passion between a brother and sister, and to compare these with Shakespeare, in order at once to perceive the extent of the æsthetic gap between these disciples and their master. And still wider is the distance between them in an ethical respect. In a number of dramas which originated contemporaneously with Shakespeare or after him, we are transported into an infected sphere, among the middle and lower London classes, where morals were more heathenish, says Massinger, than among the heathen, and crime, as Ben Jonson represents, was more refined than in hell. 'The society in which we here move'—thus it is said in a serious Morality of this time ('Lingua,' 1607)—'is that of passionate lovers, miserable fathers, extravagant sons, insatiable courtesans, shameless bawds, stupid fools, impudent parasites, lying servants, and bold sycophants.' Yet even these figures and subjects were not hideous enough for the poets; they had recourse at the same time especially to Italian society, as it is depicted in the history and romance of the age—a world of corruption, which, with bare-faced shamelessness and obduracy, delights in an impudent ostentation of strong and violent crimes. Not satisfied with this characteristic choice of the most repulsive matter, they could not even portray it faithfully enough in the coarsest realistic truth without an ideal perspective. Nay, not even satisfied with this photographic image, they chose rather to hold the concave mirror before the age, that the deformity might be yet more deformed. Lingering with darkened vision upon these shadow-sides in their plays, which can often only awake the interest of criminal procedures, concealing by silence the light-side of that luxuriant English race and their political and religious power, the greater part of these poets adhere notwithstanding firmly to the ethical vocation of their art, but

like Ben Jonson they fall into a harsh and severe theory of intimidation, which misses its aim in the poet's task still more than in that of the judge. Wherever they more positively tend to a moral idea, as is the case with Heywood and Massinger, they fall into another devious path. Losing that sense of moderation, which in Shakespeare measures human actions according to the pure eternal moral law, these Romanticists of English literature point in idealistic extravagance to conventionally extolled virtues, and bring forward examples of exaggerated ideas of honour and fidelity, in the style of the Spanish drama. And still more frequently these poets, though conscious of their vocation as elevators of morals, drawn down by the gravitating force of the corrupt conditions of life, suffer their hand to sink in convulsive efforts, and even inconsiderately resign themselves to the current of depravity, and sketch with seductive pencil the vices of the age, dead to the sensibility of moral feeling. This internal ruin sufficiently explains why the dramatic poetry of England, rapidly as it started forth, and luxuriantly as it grew up, just as quickly withered; why its constant adversary, Puritanic religious zeal, forced it so soon to relinquish the task for which it had proved itself too weak—the task of purifying society by a moral revolution. We can imagine that this degeneration of the stage would have been alone sufficient ground for Shakespeare's premature withdrawal from the stage, from London, and from his poetic vocation; he could no longer recognize his own work in the wild practices of those who believed themselves his most devoted disciples. For the intellectual extent of his historical survey of the world, the profound character of his poetic creation, and his moral refinement of feeling, were to the whole race a sealed letter. All this, however, makes Shakespeare's appearance in no wise a marvel. The passionate sympathy of the people for the art of the stage, the merry life of the court, the activity of a great city, the prosperity of a youthful state, the multitude of distinguished men, of famous persons by sea and land, in the cabinet and in the field, who were concentrated in London, the ecclesiastical and political advance on all sides, the scientific discoveries, the progress of the arts in other branches; all this combined together in producing the poet, whose fascinated eye rested upon this whole movement. So, too, in the history of European civilization, Shakespeare's great contemporary, Francis Bacon, is no excep-

tion, although at that time in England he stood as solitary as Shakespeare. All that belonged to the theatrical apparatus—the means and the material—lay ready for the great poet's dramatic art. No great dramatist of any other nation has met with a foundation for his art of such enviable extent and strength, with such a completeness of well-prepared materials for its construction, such as ancient tradition and present practice afforded to Shakespeare. From the Mysteries he drew the necessity for epic fulness of matter, from the Moralities he gained ideal and ethical thought, from the Comic Interludes he derived the characteristic of realistic truth to nature, from the Middle Ages he acquired the romantic matter of epic-poetic and historical literature; from the present he obtained the strong passions of a politically excited people, and of a private society deeply stirred by the religious, scientific, and industrious movements of the age. The higher ideal of art, and the more refined conception of form, which in this branch of poetry was not yet existing in England, he could gather from antiquity when not drawing from the resources of his own mind, and from the more cultivated branches of poetry, in which Sidney and Spenser had laboured. But that which beyond all had the most direct influence upon Shakespeare's dramatic poetry, and affected it in a manner which unhappily we cannot sufficiently estimate, was the flourishing state of the histrionic art. It is certain that Shakespeare learned more from one Richard Burbage than he could have done from ten Marlowes; and he who is searching for proofs of any direct aid to our poet in his young and yet uncertain art, need seek no other.

We must, therefore, turn our attention briefly to dramatic affairs in Shakespeare's time.

THE STAGE.

The history of the stage in London kept pace with the progress of dramatic poetry. Patronized by an amusement-loving queen, and even after her death promoted in every way by the learned James, supported by an ostentatious nobility, and sought after in increasing degree by a sight-loving people, the stage rose extraordinarily both in the capital and country during the last thirty years of the sixteenth century. All that had before been for the most part the rough inoffensive amusement of artisans for their own pleasure; all that the servants of the nobles had only acted before their masters, or the members of the courts in Gray's Inn and the Temple had only played before the queen or before their fellows in a small circle; all that the children of the royal chapel or the choristers of St. Paul's had attempted in histrionic art before the court; this now found its way among the mass of the people, and throughout the whole extent of the land. The sacred and moral tendency of the Mysteries and Moralities gave way to an exuberance of jests and burlesques; the miserable attempts at poetry were exchanged for a serious pursuit of art prosecuted with all the zeal of novelty; acting, once a humble talent kept under a bushel, stepped forward into public life, and became a profession capable of supporting its votary. A great excitement in favour of the new art, to an extent which has never again been manifested but in Spain at the time of Lope de Vega, seized the people even to the lowest orders, and at the very outset the young stage was not lacking in overweening extravagance, while it felt itself doubly secure in the favour of the court and of the whole nation. The Lord Mayor and aldermen of London endeavoured with remarkable perseverance to put an end to, not only the mischief, but even the existence and duration of this art; the royal Privy Council, on the other hand, was the refuge of the players,

especially of the regular companies, who gave their representations in town or country under the protection of the crown or under the name of some great noble. These noble companies often, rightly or wrongly, announced themselves as royal players; and under the pretext of being obliged to prepare themselves for their play before the queen, they set up their stage in taverns (for at the time of which we speak there were no established theatres), into which the lowest dregs of the people streamed. Besides these there were vagabonds and adventurers, who played without any official license, and therefore became the object of repeated prohibitions. In Puritan England there was difficulty in keeping the Sunday, even the time of divine service, free from these profane representations. The playhouses were overcrowded, the churches empty. At court, the plays on Sunday were maintained for a long time, and it was a malicious joy to the Catholics to refer to this disorder of the newly-established Protestantism, which the City authorities named, in opposition to divine service, a devil's service. At the evening assemblies of the lowest London company in the tavern-theatres, there was quarrelling and noise, pick-pocketing and immoral scenes of all sorts; upon the stage, a danger of fire; during the time of the plague, an increase of infection. Besides these gross public evils, the City authorities were apprehensive of the publication of unchaste speeches and actions, of the corruption of youth, and of the extravagance of the poor who brought their pennies for the play. When, upon the repeated decrees of the municipalities against the excesses of the stage, the royal players complained to the Privy Council and alleged in their defence the exercise of the art for the court and their need of support, the authorities replied that it was not necessary that they should practise before the lowest company; that they ought to play in private houses; and that with respect to their maintenance, it had never been customary to make the drama a trade! These attacks only served to establish the infant stage more firmly. The word 'trade' was accepted, as it were, as a challenge; a regular art was now cultivated, which sought its own temple. 'Art was tongue-tied by authority,' as Shakespeare says in his sonnets, but the race to the goal only proceeded with greater effort. In the year 1572 an Act appeared 'for the punishment of vagabonds,' that is of those players who did not belong to one of the nobles of the kingdom. In the following year the Mayor and aldermen of London gave a refusal to a request of the Earl

of Sussex, in favour of a Dr. Holmes, for the establishment of playhouses. When, in the year 1574, the servants of the Lord Chamberlain, the Earl of Leicester, at whose head stood James Burbage, gained a patent which licensed them to play in town and kingdom for the solace and pleasure of the queen as well as for 'the recreation of her loving subjects,' the City burdened the license granted to the company by an obligation to contribute half their income to the benefit of the poor. However, soon after, and perhaps in consequence of this opposition, James Burbage received, through the powerful influence of his master, permission to erect a theatre outside the jurisdiction of the town, but close by the City wall, in the dissolved monastery of the Blackfriars, near the bridge of the same name; at the same time arose the 'Theatre' and the 'Curtain' at Shoreditch, not far distant. About 1578 there were already eight different theatres in and near the city of London, to the great sorrow of the Puritans. About the year 1600 the number of theatrical buildings, exclusively devoted to this object, had risen to eleven; under James I. they reckoned seventeen existing or restored playhouses; a number which London at the present day, immensely increased as it is, falls short of possessing. Thus the better actors passed from wandering to stationary companies, which, as Hamlet says, 'both in reputation and profit, was better both ways.' The art was by this means confirmed in its development and intrinsic value. Its importance and significance, the esteem of the actors, their position and influence, rose unhindered. Who could venture to oppose the omnipotent Lord Chamberlain, the chief patron of theatrical matters? Who could dare to oppose the pleasure of the queen, who in 1583 for the first time took twelve royal players into her service, among them those two rare men Robert Wilson and Richard Tarlton, comic actors of the most versatile extemporizing wit, the last of whom was for the age a prodigy of comic skill? The aldermen of London were obliged to submit that this 'lord of mirth,' to whom everything was permitted, and who at the royal table attacked even Raleighs and Leicesters, should ridicule in a jig their 'long-earde familie,' who would see no fools but among their 'brethren of assize.' Not even ruling princes, not the state, nor politics, nor religion, were spared by the actors on their stage. After the ruin of the Armada they ridiculed the King of Spain and the Catholic religion; and on the other side the Puritans, the sworn enemies of the drama, had to fear the

scourge of satire. Not alone the theatre in Shoreditch, but the choristers of St. Paul's, ventured to deride the Puritans in their plays, and about the year 1589 two companies were in consequence forbidden to act. Subsequently, in the reign of James I., under whom theatrical affairs rose into still greater favour, objectionable pieces were produced in the Blackfriars Theatre, at which the members of the council, the aldermen, and at last the foreign ambassadors, complained. This custom of attacking upon the stage public characters, the state, law, rule, and living private individuals, originated, according to Thomas Heywood's assertion, with the children of St. Paul's; the poets placed their sallies in their lips, using their youth as a shield and privilege for their invectives. Soon the insolence of these boys turned against the stage itself. About the time at which Hamlet was written, these children, favoured by the public and the writers, had risen over 'Hercules and his load,' that is to say, over the Globe Theatre, the most famous of all; they ridiculed the adult performers, the 'common stages.' It is for this that Shakespeare casts a reprehensive glance, in Hamlet, upon these unfledged nestlings and their pertness, who certainly would themselves grow up into 'common players.' But it was just this bold interference in the life of the great capital which pleased the people. The other theatres imitated it, and carried it further than had ever been the case in a modern state since Aristophanes.

All these things collectively render it evident that the vigorous inclination towards this new art, sustained and nourished in all classes by the people itself, was sufficiently powerful to boldly defy the opposition of the strongest prejudice, of the most powerful classes, of the clergy and the magistrates, of the Church and police. All advanced in the most flourishing condition; the managers of the dramas made increasing profits; the most distinguished artists, Edward Alleyn, Richard Burbage, and even our Shakespeare, died as large landholders and wealthy people. It was in vain that the religious denounced the stage in the most forcible writings; it was in vain that dramatic poets themselves repented of their profane toils, and recalled back their companions from this school of abuse. From 1577–79, when Northbrooke's treatise against 'Vain Plays or Interludes' and Gosson's 'School of Abuse' began the strife against the stage upon Christian and stoical principles, and supported by the authorities of the

Church Fathers and heathen writers, a continual controversy in poetry and prose, for and against theatrical matters, was prolonged through the whole period of the highest prosperity of the theatre, until the year 1633, when Prynne's 'Histriomastix,' the labour of seven years, appeared, at a time when the Puritans and their anti-theatrical opinions had acquired greater force and assurance. Before this time all opposition was fruitless. The dramatic poets multiplied like their works. The diary is preserved of a certain Philip Henslowe, a pawnbroker, who advanced money to many companies; from his notices we gather that between 1591–97 110 different plays were performed, by those players alone with whom he transacted business. Between 1597 and 1603 he recorded 160 plays, and after 1597 no less than thirty dramatic authors were in his pay; among them Thomas Heywood, who alone wrote 220 plays, or had a share in them. Of all this abundance much has been lost, as no value was placed upon the publication of the plays. The ardour of the spectator was the greater, the less he read. But even when, from the printing of the works of Ben Jonson and Shakespeare, reading gained ground and the value of the stage declined, the ardent desire and taste for the art still long remained in vigour. They now saw *and* read the works; in 1633 Prynne mentions, in his before-named book, that in two years about 40,000 copies of dramas had been disposed of, as they were more in favour than sermons. The period at the close of the sixteenth century, when Shakespeare produced his Romeo, his Merchant of Venice, and his Henry IV., was the signal for the greater extension of dramatic poetry. Numbers now of professional poets appeared, who dedicated the labour of their life to the art. From this time forth the nation became aware of that inner worth of the stage, and its fame extended far beyond the kingdom. With what self-satisfaction does Thomas Heywood, in his 'Apology for Actors' (1612), glory that the English tongue, the most harsh, uneven, broken, and mixed language of the world, now fashioned by the dramatic art, had grown to a most perfect language, possessing excellent works and poems, so that now many nations grow enamoured of this formerly despised tongue. Strangers from all countries carried abroad the praise of the English actors; and soon we hear of English companies who performed in Amsterdam, and even traversed the whole of Germany, while we possess in German translations pieces from

the English stage, now again re-translated into English from the miserable rhymes of Ayrer.

The company which Shakespeare entered, when he came to London, was at that time and afterwards the most distinguished. They were the servants of the Lord Chamberlain, the Earl of Leicester, who about the year 1589 were called the Queen's Players; in their number were the fellow-citizens of Shakespeare, who probably enticed him to join them. We have said before that James Burbage, at the head of this company, founded the theatre in the monastery of the Blackfriars, which had formerly served as a depôt for the machinery and wardrobe of the pageants and masks of the court, and therefore naturally had attracted Burbage's attention. The position of this stage, in the centre of London, and the enticing attraction of its performances, vied with each other in securing to this theatre the first rank, and in giving it the highest importance as well as the greatest success. The rapid good fortune of this company may be perceived in the fact that about 1594 they built a second and more spacious theatre, the Globe, not far from the Southwark foot of London Bridge; it was an open space, where plays were performed in the fine time of the year. During the building of the Globe the Lord Chamberlain's players acted, it seems, for a time, in connection with the Lord Admiral's company at Newington, so that they appear everywhere to have been sought after and engaged. The Lord Admiral's company was the most powerful rival of the Blackfriars. Both companies escaped on every occasion that the authorities raged against the theatres, because their stages were not regarded as common playhouses, but as establishments for the practice of the plays which the queen desired. About 1597 the theatres gave another offence; the Privy Council itself this time commanded that the 'Theatre' and 'Curtain' in Shoreditch should be 'plucked down,' and 'any other common playhouses' in Middlesex and Surrey. But all these decrees appear to have been issued by the Privy Council only for the sake of appearance; in order, as Collier says, 'to satisfy the importunity of particular individuals, but there was no disposition on the part of persons in authority to carry them into execution.' The players of the Lord Admiral, who acted at the Curtain in winter, and at the Rose in summer, had been guilty of the offence in 1597; but notwithstanding they subsequently continued to perform at the Curtain, which according to decree was to have been demolished;

and at the Rose, which Henslowe had converted into a theatre in 1584; and they remained just as undisturbed as the company of the Lord Chamberlain at the Globe. In 1598 both these companies were newly licensed; and about the year 1600 Henslowe and Alleyn, the leaders of the Admiral's players, removed from the dilapidated Rose to the Fortune in Golden Lane, probably to be further from the Globe; and here Edward Alleyn, the rival of Richard Burbage, soon after purchased land, to an amount which evidences that he was an unusually wealthy man.

The stage at Blackfriars on which the two gifted friends, Shakespeare and Richard Burbage, performed, proudly boasted of being the most refined and cultivated in London. With this superiority we must not imagine that any outward splendour and luxury was combined. A happy simplicity prevailed throughout the exterior of the representation. The buildings were bad, and built of wood; those provided with a roof were called private theatres; the public ones were uncovered; gallery and boxes were divided as at present; for the best box only a shilling was paid. The proper periods for plays, before they became public spectacles, were in the winter—at Christmas, New Year's Day, Twelth-day, and Lent. But after the drama had become a profession, the public theatres were opened throughout the year; under Elizabeth, daily. Trumpets and a flag announced the approaching commencement, which took place in the afternoon at three o'clock. Music from an upper balcony, above the now so-called stage-boxes, opened the representation; the spectators amused themselves before it began with smoking and games, eating fruit and drinking beer; rude young men thundered and fought for bitten apples: so we are told in Henry VIII. The distinguished patrons and judges thronged the stage, or placed themselves behind the side-scenes. The speaker of the prologue, who appeared after the third flourish of trumpets, was generally attired in black velvet. Between the acts buffoonery and singing were kept up, and at the end of the piece a fool's jig, with trumpets and pipes, was introduced. At the conclusion of the whole a prayer was offered up by the kneeling actors for the reigning prince. The greatest care was expended on costume and dress; they appear occasionally to have been magnificent. From the 'Alleyn Papers' we know that on some occasion more than 20*l.* was given for a velvet cloak, and the adherents of good old customs

considered it most flagrant that two hundred actors should be seen splendid in silken garments, while eight hundred poor hungered in the streets. On the other hand, the scenery was extremely scanty. Trap-doors were of an early date. Movable decorations appeared later; when tragedies were acted, the theatre was hung round with black tapestry. A raised board bore the name of the place at which the spectator was to imagine himself; it was thus easy to represent ships, easy to change the scene, and natural to disregard unity of place. An elevation, a projection in the middle of the stage, served for window, rampart, tower, and balcony, and for a smaller stage in the theatre, as for example, in the interlude in Hamlet. In the court representations, however, this poor makeshift was early cast aside. In 1568 there were painted scenes, houses, towns, and mountains, and even storms with thunder and lightning. Movable decorations appeared first in 1605 at Oxford, at a representation before King James, and in the following years they were so universal that scene-shifting soon became common. A few years before Shakespeare came to London, Sir Philip Sydney described, in a deriding but expressive manner, in his 'Apology of Poetry' (1583), the rough and simple condition of the popular stage, according to his noble and learned conceptions of the dramatic art. 'In most pieces,' he says, 'you shall have Asia of the one side and Afric of the other, and so many other under-kingdoms, that the player, when he comes in, must ever begin with telling where he is, or else the tale will not be conceived. Now you shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a garden; by and by we hear news of a shipwreck in the same place; then, we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the back of that comes out a hideous monster with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders are bound to take it for a cave; while, in the meantime, two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field?' Just in a similar tone Shakespeare himself, in the prologue to Henry V., ridicules the 'unworthy scaffold' upon which the poet dares 'to bring forth so great an object,' the cock-pit, which is to represent the 'vasty fields of France,' the little number of mute figures and expedients when 'with four or five most vile and ragged foils, right ill disposed, they would disgrace, in brawl ridiculous, the name of Agincourt.'

We should draw a conclusion contrary to nature and experience if we argued from this poverty of the outworks a rough dramatic art. In Germany we have seen the theatre rise from the barn to the poor playhouse, and then to the magnificent structure; whilst the intellectual enjoyment, interest, and taste would be perhaps just in inverse proportion ever in the decline. In a generation accustomed to art and soon corrupted by art, the imagination quickly demands all the stimulants offered by magnificent decorations and accessories; the simple and fresh feeling of society, when the least enjoyments are new and overwhelming, requires none of these enhancements and incentives. The imagination is here excited by the slightest touch. Shakespeare, therefore, in that same prologue to Henry V., can confidently rely upon the 'imaginary puissance' of his auditors; he can demand of them to 'piece out' the imperfections of the stage with their thoughts, to divide one man into a thousand parts, and to create in imagination the forces which the stage cannot provide. The less distraction offered to the senses, the more the whole attention of the spectators was fixed upon the intellectual performances of the actors, and the more were these directed to the essence of their art. We must not forget how much temptation the players and spectators were spared in the false gratification of the senses, and how much the fixing of the mind upon the nature of the matter was facilitated by the one fact that no women acted. The custom of the time was strong upon this point. When, in 1629, French actors appeared in London, among whom women played, they were hissed off the stage. Dramatic *poetry* was in later times seduced by this custom to become still more bold and impudent, but for the histrionic art it offered the most tangible advantages. How many intrigues behind the scenes, how much that was dangerous to the moral character of the actor, was removed by this one habit, which at the same time promoted, with far greater results, the most refined development of the histrionic art. The female characters were to be played by boys; this made the boys' theatres a necessity; and these became a school for actors, such as we do not possess at all in later times. And what actors! From these schools proceeded Field and Underwood, who were famous even as boys; and how must these boys have been trained who could have played a Cordelia and an Imogen well enough even to suit ruder natures? And were they rude natures who at that time took an interest in the stage?

a Francis Bacon, who himself once in his youth in Gray's Inn took part in a representation? and Raleigh, Pembroke, Southampton, who, when they were in town, regularly visited the stage? We will not attach too much importance to the fact that the court distinguished before all others the players of the Blackfriars company; that King James as well as Elizabeth, according to Jonson's testimony, particularly delighted in Shakespeare's pieces; though the court was certainly the choicest auditory before which a poet like Shakespeare could wish to exhibit his works! What may we not suppose of the queen's intellectual perception and versatility, if, accustomed to the gross and open flatteries of Lilly and Peele, she could admire the refined compliments of the Midsummer Night's Dream, full as it is of enchanting poetry and allusions? But even outside the court Shakespeare's stage attracted the noblest company. Even of the public spectators, who sat in the boxes at Blackfriars, the Prologue to Henry VIII. could say that they were known to be 'the first and happiest hearers of the town.' The poet who had worked for this theatre had formed this public; how otherwise should he so steadily and so perseveringly have created his profound works if only to lavish them upon coarseness? But he fashioned his actors also. Histrionic art and dramatic poetry here met in the rarest reciprocity. The plays of Marlowe and Ben Jonson would have failed to produce the Burbage which Shakespeare's elicited; and never could the poet have preserved the profound character of his dramas, nor so often veiled with art the thoughts of his works, nor fashioned his most wonderful characters—often as if designedly—into mysterious problems, if he had not had at his side men who followed him into the depth to which he descended, who understood how to lift his veil and to solve his enigmas.

To form an idea of the manner of the older actors, when they indulged in Puritanical declamation, or practised their tragic art in Marlowe's bombastic style, or sought comic effect in low buffoonery, we need only remember the descriptions in Shakespeare's own plays. Referring to the old Miracle-plays, he mentions in Hamlet the parts of the Saracen God Termagant and the tyrant Herod, which the actors overdid in tragic fury. And his allusions to the character of Vice in the Moralities, prove that this part was played with the most commonplace buffoonery. With respect to tragic plays, he depicts in Troilus and Cressida picturesquely and expressively the pitiful extra-

vagance of the proud hero, whose 'wit lies in his sinews;' who

> Doth think it rich
> To hear the wooden dialogue and sound
> 'Twixt his stretch'd footing and the scaffoldage;

who,

> When he speaks,
> 'Tis like a chime a-mending; with terms unsquared,
> Which, from the tongue of roaring Typhon dropp'd,
> Would seem hyperboles.

These were those 'robustious and periwig-pated fellows' of whom Hamlet speaks, 'who outdid Termagant and out-heroded Herod, who delighted in tearing' a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings (those who stood on the *ground* in old theatres); players, who 'so strutted and bellowed,' that they had neither 'the accent of Christians nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man.' This pleased; it was 'praised, and that highly,' by hearers accustomed to Titus Andronicus and the horrible tragedies of Marlowe, Kyd, and Chettle; but our poet and his sensitive Hamlet were grieved to the soul, and he would gladly have 'whipped' these disqualified noise-makers who 'imitated humanity so abominably.' With regard to the comic plays, the one character of Tarlton, and what we know of himself and his acting, is sufficient to denote the previous state of things. Shakespeare may have seen him; he died in 1588. Born in the lowest station, according to one authority originally a swineherd, and to another a water-carrier, his wonderful humour brought him to the court and the stage at the same time. The tricks and jests which are related of him are a counterpart of those of our own Eulenspiegel and Claus the fool. There was scarcely a more popular man in England at his time; he was associated with that mythical representative of the popular humour, Robin Goodfellow, of whom English legends recount the same tricks as our popular books do of Eulenspiegel; they called him his fellow, and wrote after his death a dialogue between Robin and Tarlton's ghost. He was at once the people's fool, the court fool, and the stage fool. In life, on the circuits of his troops, amongst the lowest company, he practised knavish tricks and wit from the impulse of his nature. At the court, as a servant of Elizabeth, he spoke more truths to the queen than most of her chaplains, and cured her melancholy better than all her physicians. Upon the stage he was no other-

wise than in life. Small, ugly, rather squinting, flat-nosed, he enlivened his hearers if he only showed his head on the stage, and spoke not a word; with the same words, which in the lips of another would have been indifferent, he made the most melancholy laugh. But with this applause he committed an abuse, which was inconsistent with true art. He and the fools of his time regarded the play in which they acted no otherwise than the court and the streets, where they could continue their part, which was unvarying. They remained on the stage not merely in certain scenes, but during the whole piece; they improvised their jests as occasion offered; they conversed, disputed, bantered with their hearers and their hearers with them, and in these contests Tarlton was pre-eminent. After his death William Kempe, who was his pupil, became the inheritor of his fame and tricks; he played in Shakespeare's company, but twice separated from it, once just about the time in which Hamlet was written. Very possibly Shakespeare alluded to him in the famous passage which is plainly condemnatory of this kind of acting. 'Let those that play your clowns,' he says, 'speak no more than is set down for them: for there be of them, that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too: though in the mean time some necessary question of the play be then to be considered: that's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it.' It is certain that from the time of Shakespeare's appearance this ingenious waste of art was renounced. In a comedy of 1640 Brome looks back upon the time of Tarlton and Kempe, when the fools lavished their wit, and the poets spared their own for better use, as upon a remote period, in which the stage was not free from barbarisms.

From these exaggerations of jest and earnestness Shakespeare recalled the players to truth and simplicity. The actor who through diffidence failed in his part, or the actor who through arrogance overdid his character, were to him both alike unqualified. To raise the actor *above* reality, as far as the art demands this elevation, must always be left to the poet; if the latter possesses the ideal vein, which raises his poetry above the low level of common truth and reality, then the actor has to devote all his powers to give to this elevated and art-ennobled language the whole simple truth and fidelity of nature. This is the meaning of those immortal words which Hamlet offered as a positive rule in opposition to the method he had rejected—

words which should be written in gold on the inside of every stage-curtain. In our own day the actors are scarcely to be found who even understand how to deliver these words according to their sense; and yet only he who knows how to follow them throughout his art is on the sure path to become a great actor. 'Speak the speech,' so the passage reads, 'trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus; but use all gently: for in the very torrent, tempest, and as I may say, whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance, that may give it smoothness. Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor: suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature: for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now this overdone, or come tardy off, though it make the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve; the censure of the which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others.' Certainly, nothing could be more condemnatory than if we should apply these words as a test to that which we now call histrionic art; but on the other hand nothing would be grander, than if they *could*, in any case, be applied to this art without condemning it.

These golden rules remained in Shakespeare's time and company no mere precepts. Richard Burbage, in the histrionic art, was the twin-genius to which Shakespeare's poetry could offer nothing too hard nor too difficult. Born probably three years later than our poet, Burbage died three years after him. This took place at the same time as the death of James' queen, Anne; his loss was more deeply deplored than hers, to the great displeasure of the courtly world. 'He's gone,' is the lament of an elegy upon his death,

> And with him what a world are dead!
> Take him for all in all, he was a man,
> Not to be matched, and no age ever can.
> What a wide world was in that little space!
> Himself a world—the Globe his fittest place!

His acting must have been the practice of Hamlet's theory

the representation of Shakespeare's poetry; and on the other hand the poetry of Shakespeare rose higher by the influence of his histrionic art. '*He made a poet*,' is the proud language of the elegy before quoted; for having Burbage 'to give forth each line, it filled their brain with fury more divine.' In prose and poetry his contemporaries speak with enthusiasm of his graceful appearance on the stage, which, although he was small of stature,' was 'beauty to the eye and music to the ear.' He never went off the stage but with applause; he alone 'gave life unto a play,' which was 'dead, as 'twas by the authors writ;' so long as he was present he enchained eye and ear with such magic force, that no one had power to speak or look another way. In voice and gesture he possessed all that is enchanting; 'so did his speech,' says the elegy, 'become him, and his pace suited with his speech;' and every action graced both alike, whilst not a word fell without just weight to balance it. A wonderful Proteus as he was, he transformed his whole acting and appearance with facility from the old Lear to the youthful Pericles; every thought and every feeling could be read plainly marked upon his countenance. In pantomime he was aided by the art of mimicking, which, if we may credit the eulogies upon him, he practised with equal skill as his histrionic art. This one trait, which we know of his intellectual history, intimates that with him, no less than with Shakespeare, success was achieved by labour; that both added to unusual natural talents unusual industry and study, and a desire not to fall short of the gifts bestowed. In Shakespeare's plays he acted every most difficult part; in really comic characters alone he never appeared. From positive testimony we know that he played Hamlet, Richard III., Shylock, the Prince and King Henry V., Romeo, Brutus, Othello, Lear, Macbeth, Pericles, and Coriolanus. Though, according to the insinuation in Hamlet, there were at that day, as at the present, certain distinct parts, such as the king, the hero, the lover, the villain, we see that these were not for Burbage. His acting in the most diverse parts must have been ever equally great: he seemed to seek the rarest difficulties, and Shakespeare seemed to offer them to him. Very possibly, Shakespeare only produced Pericles to give his friend an opportunity of exhibiting to the spectator in a few hours a shattered life in every degree of age. If so much may be inferred from the allusions in the elegy on Burbage's death, in which his principal parts are designated here

and there with some characteristic token, he ventured in Hamlet what no actor has ventured since nor will venture: according to the direction of the poet he represented the hero in that weak, fat corpulency so readily produced by want of movement and activity, and, in moments of the greatest passion, with that 'scant of breath' peculiar to such an organisation. 'One of his chief parts wherein, beyond the rest, he mov'd the heart, was,' according to the elegy, 'the grieved Moor.' That one epithet seems to say that he penetrated into the depth of Shakespeare's character, and in his acting placed the main importance upon the sorrow of disappointment which preceded that 'return of chaos,' the unrestrained rage of jealousy; that he fixed his attention upon the one point necessary for the exhibition of Othello's character, if he is not to appear a weak unrestrained barbarian, and the play itself a cruel outrage. The depth of intellect and of feeling in this conception, if we do not impute too much to that one word, were equally to be admired. But the climax of his acting must have been Richard III. The poet has here combined everything which can create unconquerable difficulties for an actor. An insignificant ugly being, who at the same time acts like a hero in valour, and fascinates as a seducer of beauty; the key-note in these discordant touches being a masterly hypocrisy, which necessitates the actor to represent the *actor in life* upon the stage—such a task surpasses everything which the art could at any time have presented as a difficulty. The anecdote before mentioned of the citizen's wife being enchanted by Burbage's acting in Richard, whether true or invented, shows that he must have excellently represented the amiable side of the smooth hypocrite; the emphasis which he placed on the powerful side of the character is attested by another better authenticated anecdote, which proves the inextinguishable impression he made by it upon the ruder children of nature. There is extant a Bishop Corbet's poetical description of a journey which the author made in England. He records, years after Burbage's death, how he came to Bosworth. His host relates to him the battle of Bosworth, where Richard III. fell, as if he had been there, or had examined all the historians; the bishop discovers that he had merely seen Shakespeare's play in London; and this is confirmed, when at the most animated part he forgets himself, and mingles art and history: '"A kingdom for a horse!" cries Richard;' thus he meant to say; but he said Burbage instead of Richard.

Burbage's rival was Edward Alleyn. Although he did not belong to Shakespeare's company, it is just to mention him. Collier has given his Memoirs in the publications of the Shakespeare Society. He played probably as early as 1580, and was already in 1592 in great repute. He was most attractive in the more elevated characters; but he must also have appeared in comic parts, because it was boasted of him that he had surpassed Tarlton and Kempe. He acted the heroes in Greene's and Marlowe's plays, Orlando, Barabas, Faust, and Tamburlaine; and the public seem to have disputed as to the superiority of his acting and Burbage's. Whether he ever acted in the Shakespeare pieces, is doubtful; he played Lear, Henry VIII., Pericles, Romeo, and Othello; but it is conjectured that the plays were adopted with emendation upon another stage. As the two companies of Burbage-Shakespeare and Alleyn played together at Newington Butts, 1594–96, during the building of the Globe, it is possible, however, that a compromise was made, which granted to Alleyn the use of the Shakespeare pieces. That Alleyn really equalled Burbage we are inclined to doubt. Like Shakespeare, he did not long remain faithful to his profession and art; he left the stage occasionally as early as 1597, and for ever in 1606. We may remark that from that time, except in money transactions, he had nothing more to do with the stage and actors. He had acquired great possessions, certainly not merely through his dramatic profits: he ultimately owned the manors of Dulwich and Lewisham; he was the single proprietor of the Fortune, and the principal sharer in the Blackfriars theatre; besides this he possessed lands in Yorkshire, and property in Bishopsgate and in the parish of Lambeth. Simple, frugal, charitable, he was ever a kind and noble man. As he had no family, he determined to employ his riches in the establishment of Dulwich College—a hospital for the aged poor and a school for the young. The foundation of this great institution was celebrated in 1619, seven years before Alleyn's death. The actor put to shame the evil slanderers of the profession; and it is a singular incident that the same clergyman, Stephen Gosson, who long before had so violently denounced plays and players, was a near spectator of this benevolent establishment.

Such was the state of things when Shakespeare settled in London, and entered that company of Burbage's where he found his fellow-citizens. He himself trod the stage as an actor.

At that period, when dramas were not written for the sake of readers, when the separation between histrionic art and dramatic poetry had not yet taken place, it was not unusual that dramatic poets should be actors also; Greene, Marlowe, Peele, Ben Jonson, Heywood, Webster, Field, and others united both arts. With regard to Shakespeare's perfection in the art, the expressions of his contemporaries and the traditions of his biographers appear to be at variance. Chettle calls him excellent in his art; Aubrey says 'he did act exceedingly well;' Rowe, on the contrary, states that he was a mediocre performer. Perhaps these accounts are less contradictory than they appear. Collier's supposition that Shakespeare only played short parts, in order to be less disturbed in writing, appears natural and probable. We know that he acted the Ghost of Hamlet's father, and this part, it is said, was 'the top of his performance;' and one of his brothers, probably Gilbert, at an advanced age, remembered having seen him in the character of Adam, in 'As You Like It.' These are subordinate but important parts; with justice did Thomas Campbell say, that the Ghost in Hamlet demanded a good if not a great actor. It was at that time a usual custom, and another proof of the great perfection of the scenic art, that players of rank acted several parts, some very insignificant ones as well as the chief characters: this gave a harmony to the whole; it preserved uniformity of the enjoyment and of the artistic effect, and it enabled the poet to give distinction and life even to these subordinate figures. If Shakespeare, therefore, in order to pursue his poetic calling, played only shorter parts, this is no argument against his histrionic qualifications; if he played many parts of the kind mentioned, it is rather in favour of them. Yet this circumstance itself prevented his ever arriving at extraordinary perfection or pre-eminence in this branch of art. Besides, comparisons not only with Burbage, but of the actor Shakespeare with the poet Shakespeare, were at hand, in both of which the actor Shakespeare stood at a disadvantage. But the circumstance which prevented him most truly from becoming as great an actor as he was a poet was his moral antipathy to this profession. This would have ever restrained him from the attainment of the highest degree of the art, even if it had not induced him early to quit the stage. But to these events we shall return more at length.

SHAKESPEARE'S FIRST DRAMATIC ATTEMPTS.

We have endeavoured to point out the condition of the stage upon which Shakespeare entered on his settling in London, and the state of dramatic poetry, in the nurture and progress of which he now stood by the side of Marlowe and Greene, Lodge and Chettle. In the first short period of his dramatic writings we see him more or less biassed by the peculiarities of this poetry, but we observe at the same time how rapidly he sought to disengage himself from the want of design, and from the harshness and rudeness of their productions; in the beginning a subject scholar, he soon appears as a rising master. The relation of Shakespeare to his contemporaries is illustrated by the fact that his early plays were only elaborations of older existing dramas, some of which we possess for comparison; the elaborator, however, soon raised himself above his prototypes, and after a few years towered like a giant over them. Pericles and Titus—the one from internal evidence, the other from a transmitted record—are amongst these plays by another hand which were only elaborated by Shakespeare. The First Part of Henry VI. betrays at least the touches of three hands. The original of the two last parts, which Shakespeare followed step by step with his, is still preserved. In the Comedy of Errors, an English play, founded on the 'Menæchmi' of Plautus, probably lay before the poet; the Taming of the Shrew is worked after a ruder piece. These seven plays we consider, in accordance with most English critics, to be the first dramatic attempts of our poet, and we shall now glance over them in succession. We shall follow the course of the creative mind of the young poet in the workshop in which, indeed, he was yet to be himself formed.

TITUS ANDRONICUS AND PERICLES.

It is indisputable that Titus Andronicus, if a work of Shakespeare's at all, is one of his earliest writings. Ben Jonson (in the induction to 'Bartholomew Fair') said, in the year 1614, that the Andronicus—by which he could hardly allude to any other play—had been acted for twenty-five or thirty years; it would, therefore, in any case have been produced during the first years of Shakespeare's life in London. There are few, however, among the readers who value Shakespeare who would not wish to have it proved that this piece did not proceed from the poet's pen. This wish is met by the remark of a man named Ravenscroft, who, in 1687, remodelled this tragedy, and who had heard from an old judge of stage matters that the piece came from another author, and that Shakespeare had only added 'some master-touches to one or two of the principal characters.' Among the masters of English criticism the best opinions are divided. Collier and Knight assign it unhesitatingly to Shakespeare, and the former even thinks, in accordance with his opinion upon Marlowe, that as a poetical production the piece has not had justice done to it. Nathan Drake, Coleridge (a few passages excepted), and Ingleby, absolutely reject it, and Alex. Dyce believes that the 'Yorkshire Tragedy' had more claims than Titus to be numbered among the Shakespeare writings.

That which we wish we willingly believe. But in this case great and important reasons in evidence of Shakespeare's authorship stand opposed to the wish and the ready belief. The express testimony of Meres, a learned contemporary, who in the year 1598 mentions a list of Shakespeare's plays, places Titus positively among them. The friends of Shakespeare received it in the edition of his works. Neither of these facts certainly contradicts the tradition of Ravenscroft, but at all events they prevent the piece from being expunged as supposititious without examination.

In accordance with these contradictory external testimonies, internal evidence and the arguments deduced from it appear also to lead rather to doubt than to certainty. It is true that Titus Andronicus belongs in matter as well as in style entirely to the older school which was set aside by Shakespeare. Reading it in the midst of his works, we do not feel at home in it;

but if the piece is perused in turn with those of Kyd and Marlowe, the reader finds himself upon the same ground. If, agitated by Shakespeare's most terrible tragedies, we enter into the accumulated horrors of this drama, we perceive without effort the difference that exists between the liberal art which sympathises with the terribleness of the evil it depicts and quickly passes over it—and which, for that reason, suffers no evil to overtake men that cannot be laid to their own guilt and nature—and the rudeness of a style which unfeelingly takes pleasure in suffering innocence, in paraded sorrow, in tongues cut out and hands hewn off, and which depicts such scenes with the most complacent diffuseness of description. He who compares the most wicked of all the characters which Shakespeare depicted with this Aaron, who cursed 'the day in which he did not some notorious ill,' will feel that in the one some remnant of humanity is ever preserved, while in the other a 'ravenous tiger' commits unnatural deeds and speaks unnatural language. But if the whole impression which we receive from this barbarous subject and its treatment speaks with almost overwhelming conviction against the Shakesperian origin of the piece, it is well also to remember all the circumstances of the poet and his time which can counterbalance this conviction. The refinement of feeling which the poet acquired in his maturity was not of necessity equally the attribute of his youth. If the play, such as it is, were the work of his youthful pen, we must conclude that a mighty, indeed almost violent revolution, early transformed his moral and æsthetic nature, and as it were with one blow. Such a change, however, took place even in the far less powerful poetic natures of our own Goethe and Schiller; it has in some more or less conspicious degree *at any rate* taken place in Shakespeare. The question might be asked, whether, in the first impetuosity of youth, which so readily is driven to misanthropical moods, this violent expression of hatred, of revenge, and of bloodthirstiness, conspicuous throughout the piece, denotes more in such a man and at such a time, than Schiller's 'Robbers' or Gerstenberg's 'Ugolino' did, which were written in Germany, in the eighteenth century, for a far more civilised generation. When a poet of such self-reliance as Shakespeare ventured his first essay, he might have been tempted to compete with the most victorious of his contemporaries; this was Marlowe. To strike him with his own weapons would be the surest path to ready conquest. And how should an embryo poet disdain this path?

At that period scenes of blood and horror were not so rare on the great stage of real life as with us; upon the stage of art they commended a piece to hearers to whom the stronger the stimulant the more it was agreeable. It is clear, from Ben Jonson's before-mentioned testimony, that Titus was a welcome piece, which continued in favour on the stage, just as much as Schiller's 'Robbers.' Besides this approval of the people, the author of Titus could claim yet higher approbation. Whoever he might be, he was imbued just as much as the poet of Venus and Lucrece with the fresh remembrance of the classical school; Latin quotations, a predilection for Ovid and Virgil, for the tales of Troy and the Trojan party, and constant references to old mythology and history, prevail throughout the play. An allusion to Sophocles' 'Ajax,' and similarity to passages of Seneca, have been discovered in it. All the tragic legends of Rome and Greece were certainly present to the poet, and we know how full they are of terrible matter. The learned poet gathered them together, in order to compose his drama and its action, from the most approved poetical material of the ancients. When Titus disguises his revenge before Tamora, he plays the part of Brutus; when he stabs his daughter, that of Virginius; the dreadful fate of Lavinia is the fable of Tereus and Progne; the revenge of Titus on the sons of Tamora, that of Atreus and Thyestes; other traits remind of Æneas and Dido, of Lucretia and Coriolanus. Forming his one fable from these shreds of many fables, and uniting the materials of many old tragedies into one, the poet might believe himself most surely to have surpassed Seneca.

The inference drawn from the subject and contents of the play concerns its form also. With Coleridge the metre and style alone decided against its authenticity. Shakespeare has nowhere else written in this regular blank verse. The diction, for the most part devoid of imagery, and without the thoughtful tendency to rare expressions, to unusual allusions, and to reflective sayings and sentences, is not like Shakespeare. The grand typhon-like bombast in the mouth of the Moor, and the exaggerated mimic play of rage, is in truth that out-heroding Herod which we find the poet so abhorring in Hamlet. Yet even here the objection may be raised, that it was natural for a beginner like Shakespeare to allow himself to be carried away by the false taste of the age, and that it was easy for a talent like his to imitate this heterogeneous style. If we had no testimony as

to the genuineness of Shakespeare's narrative poems, scarcely anyone would have considered even them as his writing. Just as with a master's hand he could imitate the conceits of the pastorals, the lyric of the Italians, and the tone of the popular Saxon song, just as well and indeed with far more ease could he affect the noisy style of a Kyd and a Marlowe. At the same time we must confess that at least here and there the diction is not quite alien to Shakespeare. The second act possesses much of that Ovid luxuriance, of that descriptive power, and of those conceits, which we find also in Venus and Lucrece, of which indeed single passages and expressions remind us. It was in these passages that even Coleridge perceived the hand of Shakespeare, and he had in these matters the keenest perception.

Amid these conflicting doubts, these opposing considerations, we more readily acquiesce in Ravenscroft's tradition, that Shakespeare only elaborated in Titus an older play. The whole, indeed, sounds less like the early work of a great genius than the production of a mediocre mind, which in a certain self-satisfied security felt itself already at its apex. But that which, in our opinion, decides against its Shakespeare authorship is the coarseness of the characterisation, the lack of the most ordinary probability in the actions, and the unnatural motives assigned to them. The *style* of a young writer may be perverted, and his *taste* almost necessarily at first goes astray; but that which lies deeper than all this exterior and ornament of art—namely, the estimate of man, the deduction of motives of action, and the general contemplation of human nature—this is the power of an innate talent, which, under the guidance of sound instinct, is usually developed at an early stage of life. Whatever piece of Shakespeare's we regard as his first, everywhere, even in his narratives, the characters are delineated with a firm hand; the lines may be weak and faint, but nowhere are they drawn, as here, with a harsh and distorted touch. And besides, Shakespeare ever knew how to devise the most natural motives for the strangest actions in the traditions which he undertook to dramatise, and this even in his earliest plays; but nowhere has he grounded, as in this piece, the story of his play upon the most apparent improbability. We need only recall to mind the leading features of the piece and its hero. Titus, by military glory placed in a position to dispose of the Imperial throne of Rome, in generous loyalty creates Saturninus emperor; against

the will of his sons he gives him his daughter Lavinia, who is already betrothed to Bassianus; and in his faithful zeal he even kills one of his refractory children. At the same time he gives the new emperor the captive Gothic queen, Tamora, whose son he had just slaughtered as a sacrifice for his fallen children. The emperor sees her, leaves Lavinia, and marries Tamora; and Titus, who thus experienced the base ingratitude of him whose benefactor he had been, now expects thanks from Tamora for her elevation, when he had just before murdered her son! The revengeful woman, on the contrary, commands her own sons to slay Bassianus and to dishonour and mutilate Lavinia. The father, Titus, does not guess the author of the revengeful act. The daughter hears the authors of the deed guessed and talked over; she hears her brothers accused of having murdered her husband, Bassianus; her tongue cut out, she cannot speak, but it seems also as if she could not hear; they ask her not, she can only shake her head at all their false conjectures. At length *by accident* the way is found to put a staff in her mouth, by which she writes in the sand the names of the guilty perpetrators. The dull blusterer who hitherto has been Brutus indeed and in the literal sense of the word, now *acts* the part of Brutus, and the crafty Tamora suffers herself to be allured into the snares of revenge by the same clumsy dissimulation as that by which Titus himself had been deceived. Whoever compares this rough psychological art with the fine touches with which in the poet's first production, Venus and Adonis, even amid the perversion of an over-refined descriptive style, those two figures are so agreeably and truly delineated that the painter might without trouble copy them from the hand of the poet, will consider it scarcely possible that the same poet, even in his greatest errors, could have so completely deadened that finer nature which he nowhere else discards.

If it be asked, how it were possible that Shakespeare with this finer nature could ever have chosen such a play even for the sake alone of appropriating it to his stage, we must not forget that the young poet must always in his taste do homage to the multitude, and that in the beginning of his career he would be stimulated by speculation upon their applause, rather than by the commands and laws of an art ideal. This must explain likewise the choice of Pericles, even though it were proved that Shakespeare did not undertake the elaboration of this play until a riper period. How readily the great genius

delights for a time in trifling with the puny subject of which he sees the public susceptible! Thus our own Goethe also did not disdain to vary the text of the 'Magic Flute,' and occasionally to imitate the comic characters of very subordinate comedies! Such pieces as Titus and Pericles lay within the horizon of common hearers; we know from express testimony that Pericles by good fortune obtained great applause—upon the titles of different editions it is called a 'much admired play;' in prologues of other dramas it is spoken of as a fortunate piece; the prologue of Pericles itself says that this song 'had been sung at festivals,' and that 'lords and ladies in their lives have read it for restoratives.' This popularity proceeded from the subject, which was originally taken from a Greek romance of the fifth or sixth century. The story, the hero of which is called Pericles only on the English stage, and everywhere else Apollonius of Tyre, passed from the 'Pantheon' of Godfred of Viterbo into all languages and countries, in the form of romances, popular narratives, and poems. In England the story had been already translated into Anglo-Saxon; and the poet of our play may have had two English versions of it for use, in Lawrence Twine's prose translation from the 'Gesta Romanorum' (the 'Patterne of Painfull Adventures,' 1576), and in the poetic narrative of the 'Confessio Amantis' (before 1393), by John Gower, the contemporary of Chaucer. Both sources are published in Collier's 'Shakespeare's Library.' The story of 'Apollonius' was among the number of those favourite romances which in the period previous to Shakespeare were so frequently manufactured into dramas. The multiplicity of adventures and incidents attracted the sight-loving people, just as with us the romantic plays of Kotzebue for a time enjoyed great applause by the side of the works of Goethe and Schiller. The fondness for the subject of Pericles was thus transferred from the epic form to the dramatic, however rudely it was here treated. The art of transforming a narrative into a lively dramatic action—that art in which Shakespeare was from an early period entirely a master—is in Pericles quite in its infancy. The epos is only partly transposed into scenes; what could not be represented, as the prologue itself says, was made 'plain with speech' or pantomimic action; the prologues are very significantly placed in the lips of the old narrator Gower; he introduces the piece, as it were, and carries it on with narrative when the scene ceases; like a balladsinger with his puppets,

he explains the mute scene in iambics of four feet and in the antique language of the old sources, which sounded in Shakespeare's time just as the droll verses of Hans Sachs do to us. Good-humouredly, the prologue himself smiles at the quickly changing scene, in which the spectator rapidly passes over the life of the hero from his youth to extreme age; he carries 'winged time post on the lame feet of his rhyme,' and calls to aid the imagination of his hearers that he may 'longest leagues make short, and sail seas in cockles.' There is here no unity of action, but only unity of person; there is here no inner necessity for the occurrences, but an outer force; a blind chance shapes the adventures of the hero. Nor does a unity of idea, such as Shakespeare ever took as the soul of his pieces, unite the parts of the play; at the most a moral tendency connects the beginning and the end of it. At the close of the piece itself the dramatic poet places in the lips of Gower, in whose narrative he had already met with this same moral, a demonstration of the glaring moral contrast between the daughter of Antiochus, who, in the midst of prosperity, without temptation and allurement, lived in 'monstrous lust,' and the daughter of Pericles, who, 'assailed with fortune fierce and keen,' amid the snares of power and seduction, preserves her virtue and makes saints out of sinners. As in Titus Andronicus, the idea of representing the passion of revenge, in its pure and impure motives and forms, is adhered to in its repeated gratification, so here the contrast of chastity and unchastity is the moral lesson, which, after the manner of the Moralities, glances forth plainly and glaringly at the beginning and end of the piece; far from that artistic refinement with which Shakespeare usually conceals his moral lessons under the veil of actions. Yet, however forcibly in Pericles the moral is brought forward, the middle scenes of the play have no connection with this idea, unless it be by explaining how the heroine of the second part of the play was born, or by conducting the hero from his youth through a series of poor and barren scenes to his old age. All English critics are agreed in refusing Shakespeare the outline of this fantastic, rude, and badly versified play. We know that there was an older drama of the same name; to this, then, Shakespeare added a few passages, which can be more justly termed 'master-touches' than those which he may have placed to Titus.

Whoever reads Pericles with attention readily finds that

all these scenes in which there is any naturalness in the matter, or in which great passions are developed—especially the scenes in which Pericles and Marina act—stand forth with striking power from the poorness of the whole. Shakespeare's hand is here unmistakable; thus, for instance, in the fine treatment of Antiochus' crime, at the commencement of the piece; in the scene of the storm at sea (III. 1); and most especially in the last act, where the meeting of Pericles and his daughter—a scene which already in Twine's narration possesses peculiar attraction—forms a description which can rank with the best performances of the poet. The profound character of the speeches, the metaphors, the significant brevity and natural dignity, all the peculiar characteristics of Shakespeare's diction, are here exhibited. Yet these more perfect and richer scenes are only sketches; the delineation even of the two principal characters is also a sketch; but they are masterly sketches, standing in a strange contrast of delicacy with the broad details of the barbarous characters in Titus. It is an unusual part which Marina has to play in the house of crime. The poet found these scenes in the old narrations; it was for him to verify them in the character. As this Marina appears before us, arming envy with her charms and gifts and *disarming* persecution; as she comes forward on the stage strewing flowers for the grave of her nurse; sweet tender creature, who 'never kill'd a mouse, nor hurt a fly,' or trod upon a worm against her will and wept for it; as her father describes her as 'a palace for the crown'd truth to dwell in; as patience, smiling extremity out of act;' as we see her throughout, she is indeed a nature which appears capable of remaining unsullied amid the impurest, and, as her persecutor says, of making 'a puritan of the devil.' This character is sufficiently apparent; that of Pericles lies deeper. Nathan Drake regarded him as buoyant with hope, ardent in enterprise, a model of knighthood, the devoted servant of glory and of love. So much may praise be misplaced. This romantic sufferer exhibits far rather features of character entirely opposed to chivalrous feeling. His depth of soul and intellect and a touch of melancholy produce in him that painful sensitiveness, which indeed, as long as he is unsuspicious, leaves him indifferent to danger; but after he has once perceived the evil of men, renders him more faint-hearted than bold, and more agitated and uneasy than enterprising. The motives which induce him to venture the dangerous wooing of Antiochus' daughter

have not been previously depicted by the poet, but are subsequently intimated. The man who, when he perceives the dishonour of the house into which he has fallen, recognises so quickly and acutely the danger that threatens him, who penetrates in a moment the wicked nature of the sinning father, declaring that he blushes no more for his own shame, and upon its discovery 'seem'd not to strike, but smooth;' who, modest as he is prudent, ventures not to name openly, and scarcely even to himself, the perceived connection, and who thoughtfully considers his position; the man who speaks riddles proves that he is able also to solve them. And he, whose imagination, after fear has been once excited in him, is filled with ideas of a thousand dangers, whose mind is seized with the darkest melancholy, appears also in these touches to be a nature of such prominent mental qualities that, trusting rather to these than to chance, he ventured to undertake to guess the dangerous riddle of the daughter of Antiochus. Agitation, fear, and mistrust now drive him out into the wide world, and beset him in his happiness at Pentapolis, as in his danger in Antiochia; yielding to adversity, and more noble and tender than daring, he carefully conceals himself, and in a perfectly different position fears the same snares as with Antiochus; these are without doubt intentional additions by the last elaborator, for in the story and in the English narrations of it Pericles declares at once his name and origin. The tender nature of his character, which makes him anxious in moments of quiet action, renders him excited in misfortune, and robs him of the power of resistance in suffering. The same violent emotion, the same sinking into melancholy, the same change of his innermost feelings, which he remarks in himself in the first act, after his adventure in Antiochia, we see again rising in him after the supposed death of his wife and child; as at that time, he again casts himself upon the wide world and yields to immoderate grief, forgetful of men and of his duties, until the unknown daughter restores him to himself, and he at the same time recovers wife and child. The ecstatic transition from sorrow to joy is here intimated in the same masterly manner as the sudden decline from hope and happiness to melancholy and mourning was before depicted. As we said above, this is only sketched in outline; but there is a large scope left to a great actor to shape this outline into a complete form by the finishing

touches of his representation. We therefore before suggested that Shakespeare may have chosen this play, in all other parts highly insignificant and trifling, only to prepare a difficult theme for his friend Burbage, who acted this character.

We should consider this almost a decided matter, if the piece had been first elaborated by Shakespeare in the year 1609, when it appeared for the first time in print, with the words 'lately presented' on the title-page. In this case we should have here discussed the play in the wrong place. Dryden, however, in a prologue, which he wrote in 1675, to the 'Circe' of Charles Davenant, calls it expressly Shakespeare's first piece, and for this reason excuses its discrepancies. We must confess it is difficult to believe that, even with such a purpose as that which we have stated, Shakespeare should, at the period of his greatest maturity, have appropriated such a piece as Pericles for the first time. If we compare the revolting scenes of the fourth act with similar ones in Measure for Measure, a play which was written before 1609, we are reluctant to believe that Shakespeare could have prepared this over-seasoned food for the million, or even should have tolerated it from the hand of another. We should therefore prefer (with Staunton) to assume that Shakespeare appropriated the piece soon after its origin (about 1590). At the time that the play was printed with Shakespeare's name, in 1602, it may perhaps have been re-prepared for Burbage's acting, and through this it may have acquired its new fame. That at that time it excited fresh sensation is evident from the fact that the performance of the piece and Twine's version of the story gave rise to a novel, composed in 1608, by George Wilkens:[1] 'The true history of the play of Pericles, as it was lately presented by the worthy and ancient poet John Gower.' In this publication we read the iambic verses and passages of the piece transposed into prose, but in a manner that allows us to infer that the play at that time was reprinted in a more perfect form than that in which we now read it. Shakespeare's pen—so easily is it to be distinguished—is recognised in this prose version in expressions which are not to be found in the drama, but which must have been used upon the stage. When Pericles (Act III. sc. 1)

[1] Reprinted from a copy in the Zurich Library, by Tycho Mommsen. Oldenb. 1857.

receives the child born in the tempest, he says to it: 'Thou'rt the rudeliest welcome to this world that e'er was prince's child.' To this, the novel (p. 44, ed. Mommsen) adds the epithet: 'Poor inch of nature!' merely four words, in which everyone must recognise our poet. We therefore probably read this drama in a form which it neither bore when Shakespeare put his hand to it for the first nor for the last time.

HENRY VI.

Our remarks upon the two plays which we have discussed were essentially of a critical nature, for it was of less importance to determine their trifling value than their origin and the share which Shakespeare had in them. In the three parts also of the History of Henry VI. the discussion for the most part will be of a critical nature, especially that referring to the First Part, the consideration of which must be perfectly separate from that of the two last. The two last parts of Henry VI. are worked up by Shakespeare from an existing original, which may have early suggested to our poet the idea, not alone of appropriating them with additions to his stage, but also of appending to them the whole series of his histories, and this not only as regards the facts, but even the leading idea. For the First Part, on the contrary, we possess no sources; in its purport it is but very slightly united with the two last parts, and this union did not originally exist in the piece. The latter parts afford the counterpart to Shakespeare's Richard II. and Henry IV.; as the former treat of the elevation of the House of Lancaster, the latter refer to the retribution of the house of York; the First Part, on the other hand, in its original form treated only of the French wars under Henry VI. and the civil discord which occasioned the losses in France. The satirist Thomas Nash, in his 'Pierce Penniless' Supplication to the Devil,' 1592, alludes to a piece in which the 'brave Talbot,' the dread of the French, is raised from the tomb 'to triumph again on the stage.' Whether this allusion refers to our drama or to another Henry VI., which, as we know, was acted in 1592 by Henslowe's company, it is evident that this is indeed the essential subject of our play; all that relates to the rising York and his political plans was without doubt added by Shakespeare, in order to unite the play with the two others. It may almost with

certainty be denied that Shakespeare had any farther share in the piece than this. From Malone's ample dissertation upon the three parts of Henry VI. until Dyce, our poet has generally been refused in England all share in the authorship of this first part. The extraordinary ostentation of manifold learning in the play is not like Shakespeare, nor is the style of composition. Coleridge enjoins the comparison of Bedford's speech at the beginning of the piece with the blank verse in Shakespeare's first genuine plays, and 'if you do not then feel the impossibility of its having been written by Shakespeare,' he says, 'you may have ears—for so has another animal—but an ear you cannot have.' If the subject induced the poet to appropriate the piece as a supplement to the completion of the two following parts, without question his share in it is a very small one. That he himself, after the custom of the time, originally composed the piece in company with other poets, is not credible, because a man of Shakespeare's self-reliance must have early felt the unnaturalness of this habit. It is, on the other hand, probable that the piece which he elaborated occupied various hands at the same time, because the marks of them are plainly to be discerned.

No piece is more adapted to the explanation of the manner in which Shakespeare, as soon as he was himself, did *not write* his dramatic works. His historical plays follow for the most part the historical facts of the well-known chronicle of Holinshed, and adhere rigorously to succession and order, rejecting all fable. The First Part of Henry VI., on the contrary, follows another historical narrative (Hall), and adds single events from Holinshed and other partly unknown sources; great historical errors, a medley of persons, a remarkable confusion in the computation of time, and a series of non-historical additions, characterise the treatment of this history—faults of which Shakespeare has never been guilty. The history of the Countess of Auvergne, the threefold cowardice of Fastolfe, the recapture of Orleans by Talbot, the surprise of Rouen, and the apprehension of Margaret by Suffolk, are mere inventions, partly to be referred to patriotic zeal. Such did not appear to be Shakespeare's general idea of a dramatic history, in which he always, as far as possible, strictly adhered to genuine tradition. It is not our intention to set forth these historical errors, as we do not consider Shakespeare's historical plays from this point of view; we refer the reader to Courtenay's 'Commentaries' upon the historical

dramas of the poet, in which this method of consideration is exclusively attended to.

If we take the piece purely in a dramatic point of view, and consider it as a work for the stage, it affords, as we before said, an excellent lesson, in its contrast to Shakespeare's general mode of proceeding. There is here no unity of action, indeed not even, as in Pericles, a unity of person. If we look strictly into the single scenes, they are so loosely united, that whole series may be expunged without injuring the piece, indeed perhaps not without improving it—an attempt which even in Pericles could not be carried far. We need only superficially perceive this, in order to feel how far removed the dramatic works of art previous to Shakespeare were from that strong and systematic inner structure, which admits of no dismemberment without distortion.

In the First Part of Henry VI. the scene between Talbot and the Countess of Auvergne may be omitted, and the play only loses an unessential addition, in a dramatic as well as in an historical aspect.

Suffolk's wooing of the captive Margaret may be expunged, and we find that then the third and fourth scenes of the fifth act more naturally blend into one scene; the execution of the Maid of Orleans, which is now uselessly postponed, is then joined to the former scene, without the necessity of changing a single line. If this scene were an addition, the last scene in connection with it, in which the king chooses Margaret for his queen, must likewise have been supplemented. We expunge that also, and we find that Winchester's treaty (Act v. sc. 4) affords a perfect conclusion to the play, and one in far better accordance with its main substance.

The scenes of the death of Talbot and his son (Act iv. sc. 6, 7) stood without doubt in the original piece, as they relate to the principal hero, but it is impossible to impute them to the author who wrote the principal parts of the drama. They are of a lyric elegiac colouring, in itself not without poetic beauty, but wholly undramatic. In direct opposition to the opinion of Coleridge and Collier, we cannot imagine the pen of Shakespeare to have been employed in this sentimental vein.

The scene of Mortimer's death and his political 'admonishments' to York may be taken away, without being missed. The following first scene of the third act is then more closely united with the previous dissensions. And further: we may

withdraw the scene in the Temple Garden, where the strife between the white and the red rose begins, and all that, as a sequel to this scene refers to York, to his pretensions to the throne and his dispute with Lancaster; and the result is a play of greater unity, which treats of the French wars and of the domestic factions which disheartened the champions in France and occasioned the great fall of the English cause.

Even these effects of the spirit of faction in the course of the French contests do not appear to have been all in the original piece. The strife between Somerset and York in the course of the war, and its influence upon Talbot's death, appears from the whole bearing of the respective scenes to be an addition by the last elaborator. Talbot is in straits; the two dukes of Somerset and York are entreated for help by Lucy in two successive scenes (Act IV. sc. 3, 4), which, in a perfectly different style, are inserted between the elegiac Talbot scenes; natural enmity induces them to refuse; and for this reason Lucy anticipates that Talbot will perish, and laments his fall as if it had already happened. Now follows the scene of Talbot's death; York's name is scarcely mentioned, even for the sake of establishing a superficial union with these two scenes; no allusion is made to his quarrel with Somerset; and Lucy appears over Talbot's body, mourning his death in a tone as if he had known nothing of it, nor had even foreboded it!

If we separate all the scenes between York and Somerset, Mortimer and York, Margaret and Suffolk, and read them by themselves, we feel that we are looking upon a series of scenes which exhibit Shakespeare's style in his historical plays just in the manner in which we should have expected him to have written at the commencement of his career. We see the skilful and witty turn of speech and the germ of his figurative language; we perceive already the fine clever repartees and the more choice form of expression; in Mortimer's death-scene and in the lessons of his deeply-dissembled silent policy, which while dying he transmits to York, we see, with Hallam, all the genuine feeling and knowledge of human nature which belongs to Shakespeare in similar pathetic or political scenes in his other dramas; all, not in that abundance and masterly power which he subsequently manifested, but certainly in the germ which prefigures future perfection. These scenes contrast decidedly with the trivial, tedious war-scenes and the alternate bombastic and dull disputes between Gloster and Winchester; they adhere to the

common highway of historical poetry, though they have sufficient of the freshness of youthful art to furnish Schiller in his 'Maid of Orleans' with many beautiful traits, and indeed with the principal idea of his drama. If we consider it as settled that Shakespeare inserted all these scenes, we can fully explain for what reason he did so. They unite this First Part most closely with the Second and Third, while before it had been totally unconnected with them. York, the principal hero of the two last parts, here appears with his claims at the commencement of his career; Margaret, who next to him forms the most prominent figure, is here rising into note; the last scene of the First Part is intentionally placed in the closest connection with the first scene of the Second Part. The later work of Richard II., standing as it does in historical contrast to these parts of Henry VI., is accordingly treated by Shakespeare in evident dramatic relation to this same supplemented scene. As in Richard II. the dangerous rise of the house of Lancaster issues from the single combat of Norfolk and Henry, so in Henry VI. the strife of the two roses arises from the challenge between Vernon and Basset; as in the one the weak Richard at first disregards and threatens Henry Bolingbroke, and then spares and by sparing promotes him, so in the other the weak young Henry VI. emancipates the injured and dishonoured York to his own destruction. Thus by the addition of these scenes Shakespeare has made the First Part of Henry VI., regarded as a separate piece, still more disconnected than it originally was; but, on the other hand, he has so united the three parts that they afford a perfect picture of the rule of Henry VI., and, at the same time, in depicting the rise of York, a complete counterpart to that of the house of Lancaster, the description of which he had probably already planned during the elaboration of these three parts of Henry VI.

We may consider the two last parts of Henry VI. as a single play; that is, as a dramatic chronicle in ten acts; neither in outer form nor in inner idea are the two pieces otherwise than mechanically divided. The events in France, which formed the principal subject in the First Part, are here removed to the farthest background; the reader scarcely observes the short passages in which we learn that Somerset is sent to France, and that this valuable possession is completely lost to England. The subject of the two last parts is the contest of the houses of York and Lancaster, the decline of England's power under the

weak and saintly Henry VI., and the rise of York, the father of the terrible Richard III. Subsequently, as we before said, Shakespeare furnished a counterpart to this work in the preceding elevation of the house of Lancaster, in the rise of the similarly aspiring and crafty Bolingbroke above the equally weak and worldly Richard II. In the Second Part (Act. VI. sc. 1) it is expressly indicated in a passage which is Shakespeare's property, that the fall of Henry VI. was an expiation of the unlawful murder of Richard II. by the Lancastrians. Other passages prove that Shakespeare had at hand the chronicles of Holinshed when he remodelled the originals of the two latter parts; thus, he may have surveyed the whole history of the struggle between the two houses in this the first of his historic-dramatic works; and aware of its political and historical value, he may have early conceived the plan of that series of historical dramas which he soon afterwards carried into execution.

We have already said that Shakespeare, in the two last parts of Henry VI., only revised two plays, the originals of which are preserved, and were recently published by Halliwell in the writings of the Shakespeare Society.[1] To compare these works, which by a plausible conjecture are attributed to Robert Greene, with Shakespeare's elaborations, is to take a glance into the innermost workshop of his youthful poetic genius. If these dramas did nothing more than direct Shakespeare's eye to the higher world of history, for this alone they would be of the most decided importance as regards the history of his mind.

Happy was it for the English stage that in its early development it lighted upon these subjects of national history. In the sources from which dramatists were usually accustomed to draw, such as the chivalric romances of the Middle Ages, old fables and legends, tales and popular books of a romantic tenour, the want of nature was great, and the want of taste still greater. The art of the dramatic poets was feeble. Where the subject afforded a wide field for their free inventive powers the work

[1] Their titles are: 'The First Part of the Contention betwixt the two famous Houses of York and Lancaster,' and 'The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York.' The oldest impressions are dated 1594 and 1595, and do not bear Shakespeare's name. The tragedy of the 'Duke of York' was acted by the servants of the Earl of Pembroke, for whom Greene wrote, but Shakespeare never. After Shakespeare's death, the two pieces (in 1619) were published with his name by Pavier, who has also printed other doubtful and spurious plays of Shakespeare.

degenerated into distortion—a fact which we see exemplified in such plays as Titus and Pericles. On the other hand, in the simple and homely chronicles of their national history, the dramatists found in the civil wars a great and mighty material, a nature congenial to their own, a nation in action whom they knew, and prominent characters which were comprehensible to them; they found psychological truth stored up and ready for their use, while they had vainly groped after it in their romantic attempts. At the very time that Shakespeare began to write, this national historical drama, as we have seen above, threw out its first shoots. Among these early Histories we mentioned the two pieces by Greene upon Henry VI., which are superior to almost the whole series of pre-Shakespeare plays of this kind. The chronicle itself is often merely transferred to them and dryly arranged in scenes, but this very fact exhibits all the more clearly the value which rests in an important subject borrowed from simple nature.

The general reader is not acquainted with these two plays, and cannot therefore compare them with Shakespeare's elaboration of them; but it is necessary to speak of them as they are in their original form, in order to show what help they afforded to Shakespeare, how far they were suggestive for his historical dramas, and what he added in his *own* Henry VI.

When Tieck says that nothing of Shakespeare's—not even his noblest and best works—can be compared in plan with the historical tragedy of Henry VI., and that the mind of the poet grows with his subject, and when Ulrici states the composition to be truly Shakespeare-like, both these critics betray that they do not distinguish between matter and form, and that they have not compared the chronicles which these dramas follow with the poetical version. There cannot be much question of plan and composition in a piece which simply follows, with few exceptions and errors, the course of the chronicle; which like the chronicle unfolds in succession the various strata of matter, and brings forward a series of scenes, such as the anecdote of the armourer and the lame Simpcox, standing in but very slight connection with the great course of the whole. Whoever reads the narrations of Hall and Holinshed by the side of Henry VI., whether Greene's version or Shakespeare's, will perceive the most accurate transcript of the text of the narrative, even in passages where he would have least supposed it. The whole insurrection of Cade, in the Second Part, full as it is of popular

humour, proceeds so entirely from the historical sources, that even the speeches of the rough rebels, which appeared more than anything else to be the property of the poet, are found partly verbatim in the chronicle of St. Albans, from which Stowe quotes them in his account of the insurrection of Wat Tyler and Jack Straw. Single highly-poetical passages, such as the prophecy of Henry VI. concerning Richmond, the bold answer of the captive Prince of Wales, the assassination of the young Rutland, and others, are not only borrowed from the chronicle, but the last scene makes in Holinshed also an affecting and poetical impression. When, according to Tieck's expression, the poetical power in these plays increases with the subject, it is because this is the case with the matter of the chronicle also; in reading the Second Part, we need only follow the corresponding passages in Holinshed, and we find after Gloster's assassination that the history becomes richer and more attractive, just as the drama itself does. It is the subject that forms the grandeur and attraction of these pieces, and this even in the plainest historical structure. The drama of this great avalanche of ruin which overwhelms all the powers in the native state; this dissolution of all bonds, this chaos in which misdeed succeeds misdeed, crime rises above crime, and an inexorable Nemesis follows close at the heels of the offending man; all this bears in itself a powerful interest, which rather carries away the poet than that the poet himself creates it. The picture of the gradual decay of all the powers of the state is an image of pure historical truth and of great experience, far more than a delineation of poetic beauties, which influence by harmonious arrangement; but that which invests it with the deep impression upon the mind produced by art is the moral or poetic justice which we cannot spare from the drama, and which is nowhere lacking in the historical work of our great master, in which, as in all periods of revolution, the motives, actions, and destinies of men lie exposed to our view. We see foremost, in the Second Part, the Protector of the kingdom perishing through his own weakness, and his queen through her criminal pride. They fall by the cabals of the hostile nobility, who are leagued together for evil; of that nobility who had produced nothing but mischief to the country ever since the days of Richard II. Again, the fall of Suffolk and the rebellion of Cade are entirely represented as a retributive judgment upon the aristocracy, as a rising of the suffering lower classes against

the oppression, unscrupulousness, and severity of the rule of the nobles. This democracy we see in its turn quickly perishing in its own fury and folly; and on the ruins of the aristocracy and the incited people, the tools of a crafty ambition, York raises himself to the dignity of a new Protector, relying upon popular favour and upon his warlike deeds and merits. Having attained his object, he allows himself to be tempted to perjury, and vengeance follows his footsteps. Rutland, one of his sons, shares his terrible fall. The king himself, who stands in inactive weakness and contemplative devotion, scarcely accountable amidst the ruin of all things, is now on his side tempted by the queen to become a perjurer, and falls into the power and under the sword of his enemies. From the blood of Rutland and of the Prince of Wales springs a new harvest of avenging destinies. Clifford, the murderer of the former, falls; Edward, who was present at the assassination of the prince, totters on his throne; the valiant Warwick, who at last from personal indignation was unfaithful to his old party, perishes. Through all these disasters and retributions Queen Margaret passes unscathed, like some embodiment of fate, pursued by the most refined vengeance of the Nemesis: raised as a captive to the English throne, as 'a beggar mounted,' she had, according to the adage, 'run the horse to death,' and, surviving to her own torment, she sees all her glory buried; the source as she is of all these sufferings, she is to drink them even to the dregs. Yet this whole catastrophe, we see plainly, is only history, and no poetic plan and composition; this administration of justice, which appears so systematic and poetic, is simply taken from the chronicle. In the passage where the Prince of Wales (Act x. sc. 5) is stabbed by Clarence, Gloster, Grey, Dorset, and Hastings, the chronicles of Hall and Holinshed both make the emphatic and explicit remark: 'For the wicked deed most of the perpetrators in their latter days drank the same cup, in consequence of the deserved justice and the due punishment of God.' In this spirit history was and is written in that as in every primitive age. This idea was carried out afterwards by Shakespeare, in Richard III., in the fate of those same perpetrators in every single instance, and with an equal emphasis. We are tempted to suppose that Shakespeare learned from this play and from this history of Henry VI. to satisfy in his art the law of poetic justice; in the continuation of Henry VI. and in Richard III. it is almost too glaringly exercised to be called

poetically beautiful; in all the later works of Shakespeare this law is obeyed with the greatest scrupulousness, and in many plays with admirable refinement. In any case, this law in the poet's dramatic art arose from no system of æsthetics nor from the models of old masters, but purely from that observation of human nature and human destiny, between which even the simple historiography of old recognises that close connection which exhibits man everywhere as the forger of his own fate.

This important historical subject was intelligently apprehended by Robert Greene, in his two plays (if they are rightly his), though it was dramatised in a very different manner. He directed his attention entirely to the importance of the material, and to the details in the historical sources which lay before him—a sufficient proof that artistic form but little interfered. And here lies the great difference between this and the Shakespeare histories: that in the latter, when they even follow the chronicle with as much fidelity as Greene's 'Henry VI.,' the poet generally appears greatest just where the chronicle leaves him. In the Second Part of Greene's 'Henry VI.,' the third act exhibits able and powerful arrangement; the popular scenes of Cade's insurrection are full of happy humorous life. In the first act of the Third Part, the fall of York, a high pathos is preserved, without the usual exaggerations of the older dramatic school; in the words of York and Margaret, Shakespeare could learn the genuine language of great passion, and he found here no inducement to add much of his own. In the second act, where York's sons are aroused, an excellent warlike spirit prevails throughout; and here also Shakespeare, with the most correct feeling, has restrained his improving hand. But from the third act, and especially in the fourth and fifth, where the history of Henry VI. is almost reflected in miniature in the weak voluptuous Edward and his beggar queen, there begins a series of political scenes with little pathetic emotion; quickly and mechanically these scenes follow each other without exciting any attractive interest; they are scanty even in Shakespeare's version, though he nevertheless took pains to make something out of the still more scanty and skeleton-like scenes of Greene, to lengthen their contents, and to subdue the strange hurry with which Greene pressed on to the end. Even in Shakespeare's version the reader may observe these naïve deficiencies. In the eighth scene of the fourth act Warwick goes to Coventry, and at the same moment Edward is aware of it, as if they had just

met on the stairs. In Act v. sc. 5 the Prince of Wales is murdered; in the succeeding scene the father already knows it. The hurry to the end is so great that it plainly betrays itself in repeated phrases. The questions, 'What now remains?' 'And now what rests?' 'What then?' are repeated several times in the two last acts. The inequality observable in the dramatisation of the historical matter is also evident in the delineation of the characters. Whatever in the history struck the poet's mind as strongly delineated, he treated with intelligence and generally with success. Warwick, the darling of the people, 'the setter-up and puller-down of kings,' the 'coal-black haired,' the stuttering and noisy favourite and strengthener of the Yorkists, was one of these characters which was written and acted *con amore*—a most grateful part to those 'robustious periwig-pated fellows' whom Hamlet ridiculed. The Cardinal of Winchester, full of ambition and priestly arts, with his 'red sparkling eyes,' blabbing the malice of his heart, which breaks at last in the pangs of conscience; the defying insolent aristocrat Suffolk, unworthy in prosperity, proudly defiant in danger, and meeting death with the dignity and remembrance of the great men of old, who in similar manner fell by vile hands—these were the forms of character to which poets like Greene or Marlowe were equal. York also, and the female characters, to which we shall revert, are excellently maintained. The more deeply designed nature of a Humphrey, on the contrary, is only sketched for the most part; and the tender saintly figure of Henry VI. was left entirely in the silent background, and first acquired life and soul from Shakespeare. Unequal, therefore, are the characters, unequal is the organisation of single parts, and unequal is the poetic diction. While single passages are not without great and natural feeling, the plays on the whole are poor and dry; nowhere so clumsy that Shakespeare could have found much that required to be rejected, but in very few passages sufficiently full and elaborated for him to have added nothing. As in the personal characteristics, so in the diction there occurs many a strong and successful stroke, but the colours are not blended or worked up. The poet is not devoid of assonance, and he plays skilfully upon words and rhymes. Many a proverbial passage of universal truth and many an excellent poetic image glances forth from his versified prose; and it is a peculiarity of these images and similes that they are taken from the chase, from animals and their properties,

and that they abound, as it were, in physiological conceits, in which (in the coarse taste of Titus Andronicus) the human organs, lips, mouth and eyes, are endowed with life, and are frequently exhibited in most revolting positions.

Such were the dramas to which Shakespeare turned to appropriate them to his stage by manufacturing them afresh. That he did so with the reverence of a scholar is betrayed in his reluctance to erase; that he did so with the skill of future mastery is betrayed in the ardent desire for improvement, which suffered him to leave scarcely a single line intact. Much of the coarseness of the taste of the age was still left even in his improved work; nay, his own additions were sometimes of a similar character. Delight in deeds of horror and blood is not only seen in that lament of Margaret over Suffolk's head, and in Warwick's description of the corpse of the murdered Humphrey, which Shakespeare found in Greene's text, but in those words also which Edward addresses to Warwick (Act v. sc. 1), and which proceed from Shakespeare himself:

> This hand, fast wound about thy coal-black hair,
> Shall, whiles thy head is warm, and new cut-off,
> Write in the dust this sentence with thy blood, &c.

Much of that hyperbolic poetry of the Italian style, to which Shakespeare does homage in his narratives, is also to be found here; it displays itself chiefly in description, in the accumulation of artificial epithets, and in false affectation of the ancients in mythological images and learned quotations. The bombast in those passages where he speaks of tearful eyes adding water to the sea, and of the lion's 'devouring paws,' has been often censured; the far-fetched exaggerated expressions of the passion of Queen Margaret (Act II. sc. 1) remind us perfectly of the style of Lucrece. But in general the natural and simply historical material has extricated the poet from this unnatural and artificial mode of diction. His inclination to unusual and choice language, his abundance of metaphor, and the soaring of his poetic fancy, have never on the whole led him to extravagance of style, but have only served to give flesh and blood to the dry skeleton of his predecessors. The natural train of thought, the richness of feeling, the order in which passion is developed and expressed—all that reveals the true power of the poet—places him, if we compare the two texts, in the rank of a master at the side of Greene. If we read the original at almost any exciting

passage, we shall find it, if not bad and faulty, almost throughout poor and defective; that which we vaguely miss and want is brought by the true poet from the depths of the soul, and is added with unique tact and natural feeling. The stem is firm around which he clings, but only through the influence of his warm poetical embrace does it shoot forth in leaves and blossoms. He who can compare the originals of Greene with Shakespeare's revision should read, in the Second Part, the scene between Gloster and his wife (Act II. sc. 4), and see how desultorily in the one the thoughts suddenly and unnaturally change in the words of the duchess, while in the other Shakespeare has filled up the gaps with the links required. He should read, in the plot for the overthrow of Humphrey (Act II. sc. 3, 1), how the queen awkwardly and unexpectedly breaks in with the council, while on the other hand Shakespeare smoothes and prepares the way for her accusations. After Humphrey is murdered (Act III. sc. 2), the queen only coldly deliberates: 'I stood badly with Gloster, they will believe I killed him.' But Shakespeare makes her unfold the arts of female dissimulation; and while she conceals the agitation of her breast by self-accusation, what resources he bestows upon her of falsehood, deception, and hypocrisy! He should follow the poet from thence, especially to the soliloquies of the crafty York. In his first monologue (in the old play) he states his political plans with cold calculation; he relates, as dryly as the chronicle, the actual state of things; there is no emotion of feeling, no lively picture of the situation. All this is animated by Shakespeare with poetic ornament, with traits of character, with richness of language, and with descriptive detail; we do not only learn that York has seduced the popular leader Cade 'to make commotion,' but also who Cade is, and why he is thought fit for this bold part. Just so, in another soliloquy in Greene's original, York clings to the simple account of facts and the consideration suggested by them: 'I require troops: you give me them, I shall use them.' Shakespeare's addition to this just gives the feeling and passion required; he portrays the promptings of a mind deeply agitated by ambition and the restless activity of a brain through which the aspiring thoughts chase each other with their dreams of dignity; it is the picture of the man as he stands alone, conversing with himself, and not the cold enumeration of deeds which lie in the future, the motives to which alone belong to this his solitary present. In the one we receive the impression

of the icy calculator sketching out his ambitious views as systematically as he planned his deeds, whilst in the other we see at work the innate powers within him, mastering his mind, brooding over the hindrances and promotions of his projects, and lightly sketching the actions to which it spurs and incites the energy and will.

From what we have said it is evident that it is especially in the development of character that Shakespeare's talent strikes us in this comparison of the two works. Several of the characters of the play afforded him little interest. It is worthy of observation—and it points out Shakespeare's natural inclination to shun all trivialities—that foremost among the personages indifferent to him stands the grateful and heroic character of Warwick. This character, the popular hero and darling, the warrior stammering in his impetuosity and vainglorious in his self-reliance, was afterwards depicted by Shakespeare in Percy; and this illustrious counterpart ought to be compared with Warwick by the panegyrists of the plays of Henry VI., if they would accurately determine their relation to the works of the matured poet. The Cardinal of Winchester and the Duke of Suffolk were finished by Shakespeare according to the outline designed, without any great sympathy with these characters, though not without certain masterly touches which would have betrayed his hand if we did not know him as the elaborator. In that passage in the old piece, where Suffolk asks the murderers of Humphrey whether they have despatched him, Shakespeare characterises the man by the cutting heartless question: 'Now, sirs, have you despatch'd *this thing?*' The excellent contrast of the two masculine women, Eleanor and Margaret, Shakespeare found already before him; Greene had worked at both these characters with the greatest success and industry. The jealousy and hatred between the rich, proud, ambitious duchess, with her unconquerable mind, and the upstart portionless woman, with her fierce malicious nature, are excellently portrayed. The vindictive, furious, and unrestrained character of the queen, whose face, 'visor-like, unchanging,' expresses the frigidity of her nature, is depicted, in glaring but striking touches, in the scene of York's death, where in cruel wantonness she trifles as the cat with the mouse. To atone in some degree for this flinty heart, Greene has imputed to her a true, perhaps too tender feeling for Suffolk, the origin of her doubtful good fortune. Shakespeare has here added but

little; still that little is perfectly in the spirit of the plot. Let us only compare attentively in the scene of the farewell between Eleanor and her husband the trait he has interwoven: how, after her fall, the most fearful thing to the ambitious woman is that the 'giddy multitude do point' at her, and how her unbridled worldly ambition is suddenly changed into a longing for death. Characters of finer mould, which demanded Shakespeare's finer nature, are Gloster and the king. Duke Humphrey of Gloster, who appears in the second part totally different to the Gloster of the first, is invested with the great qualities of consummate mildness and benevolence, with a Solomon-like wisdom, with freedom from all ambition, and with severe Brutus-like justice towards everyone, even towards his wife, in whose last dishonour he notwithstanding shares as a private character. The greatness of his self-command, which is contrasted with the unbridled passion of his wife, has been rendered prominent by Shakespeare in one of his happy touches. In the passionate scene (Part II. Act I. sc. 3), preparatory to his own fall and that of his Duchess, he goes out and returns without reason; Shakespeare explains this as an intentional movement, with which the loyal man endeavoured to suppress his excitement and choler. There is too much noble and quiet grandeur in Humphrey for us not to be grieved at his fall, which appears merely an exemplification of the fable of the lamb that had troubled the wolf's water. It is Shakespeare's addition that he entwined in the garland of his virtues that foolish reliance upon his innocence which leads him to destruction, and which renders him careless amid the persecutions of his enemies, although he knew that York's 'overweening arm was reaching at the moon.' At the moment of his fall, he too late becomes keen-sighted, and predicts his own ruin and that of his king. That weakness is a crime is indicated by Shakespeare in this character, and is more closely worked out in Henry VI. This character, indeed, is entirely due to him; Greene placed the king as a cypher silently into the background, but Shakespeare drew him forth and delineated his nothingness. A saint, 'whose bookish rule had pulled fair England down,' formed rather for a pope than a king, more fit for heaven than earth—a king, as Shakespeare adds, who longed and wished to be a subject more than any subject longed to be a king—he is in his inaction the source of all the misdeeds which disorder the kingdom. 'Weakness makes robbers bold;' in these words the

weakness of the king is condemned, and Shakespeare exhibits this distinctly in his relations to individuals and to the country generally. He defends (all this is Shakespeare's addition) the persecuted Protector (Part II. Act III. sc. 1) with eloquence, and afterwards suffers him to fall: this distinctly places his impotence in relief. When Humphrey is arrested, the older play places in the king's mouth two meagre lines, while Shakespeare in fuller language displays in a masterly manner the picture of weakness, the powerless man comparing himself to the dam who can do naught but low after her calf, which the butcher bears to the slaughter-house. When afterwards (Act III. sc. 2) they go to look after the murdered duke, the older play has again only two bald lines for Henry, while Shakespeare puts into his mouth an agitated prayer, and by so doing prepares the way for that state of mind in which the king, supported by the valiant Warwick, is afterwards induced to an act of severity against Suffolk. Just as the pious king here leaves unperformed the commonest acts of gratitude and attachment towards his beloved protector, so the saint forgets the most sacred duties towards his kingdom; from weakness he becomes a perjurer, from weakness he disinherits his son, thus acting as even 'unreasonable creatures' do not with their young. After he has persuaded himself that he is to expiate the sins of the house of Lancaster, he exposes himself with fatalistic equanimity to blind destiny; and whilst the civil war is raging (in a soliloquy entirely inserted by Shakespeare, Part III. Act II. sc. 5), he wishes himself a 'homely swain' in the repose of contemplation and in the simple discharge of duty. Those abstract pictures of the civil war in which the son has slain the father and the father the son, the scenes which so powerfully touched our own Schiller, appear but in scanty outline in the older play; Shakespeare's touch first gave expression to them, and by connecting them with that idyllic soliloquy of the king he first gave them their depth; for, thus introduced, they remind the king of the higher duties of his position, which he had forgotten in his selfish desire for repose.

If we may call the character of Henry VI. Shakespeare's own creation, that of Richard of Gloster, on the contrary, was wholly prepared for his use in the Third Part. The aspiring spirit inherited from his father; the glance of the eagle at the sun; the great ambition, the indifference to the means for an object; the valour, the superstition which represents in him the

voice of conscience; the subtle art of dissimulation; the histrionic talent of a 'Roscius,' the faithless policy of a Cataline; these had been already assigned to him by Greene in this piece. But how excellent even here have been Shakespeare's after-touches is evinced in the soliloquy (Part III. Act III. sc. 2), where the ambitious projects of the duke hold counsel as it were with his means of realizing them; it is the counterpart to the similar soliloquy of his father York (Part II. Act III. sc. 1), and permits us to anticipate how far the son will surpass the father. The principal figure of the two plays, Richard of York, is almost throughout delineated as if the nature of his more fearful son was prefigured in him. Far-fetched policy and the cunning and dissimulation of a prudent and determined man are blended in him—not in the same degree but in the same apparent contradiction as in Richard—with firmness, with a hatred of flattery, with inability to cringe, and with bitter and genuine discontent. With the same assurance and superiority as Richard the son, he is at one time ready to decide at the point of the sword, and at another to shuffle the cards silently and wait 'till time do serve;' both alike are animated by the same aspirations and ambitions. Had he been endowed with the same favour of nature as his father, Richard would have developed the same good qualities which the father possessed in addition to his dangerous gifts. Ugly, misshapen, and despised, without a right to the throne and without any near prospect of satisfying his royal projects, his devouring ambition was poisoned; in his father, called as he was the flower of the chivalry of Europe, convinced of his rights and proud of his merits, the aspiring disposition was moderated into a more legitimate form. At the death of his son Rutland his better nature bursts forth forcibly to light. He is honest enough, upon the pretended disgrace of his enemy Somerset, to dismiss his 'powers' and to give his sons as pledges; had he not been led away by his sons he is moderate enough, and is even ready to suspend his claims to the throne until Henry's death, whom, in the course of nature, he was not likely to survive; he laboured for his house, and not as his son, for himself. His claims and those of his house, which he asserts in opposition to the helpless and inactive Henry, he grounds not upon the malicious consciousness of personal superiority, as his son Richard does subsequently; but upon a good right, upon his favour with the people, upon his services in France and Ireland. Contrasted with Henry, he feels himself more kingly in birth,

nature, and disposition. When he exercises his retaliation on the Lancastrians, he utters those words which Bolingbroke had before more cunningly applied to Richard II.: 'Let them obey, that know not how to rule.' This contrast of York to Henry VI. is the soul of both pieces. The claims of the hereditary right of an incapable king who is ruining the country, in comparison with those of the personal merit which saves the country from destruction, is the thought that involuntarily arises from the history of the reign of Henry VI.; the poet of the older plays has uncertainly seized it; Shakespeare conceived it more fully, and carried it out. In the elaboration of these two plays this is not strikingly apparent. Shakespeare has too mechanically and timidly followed the arrangement of the whole history; we are obliged to confess that the drama, adhering to the history, creates the idea far more than that the idea, as ought to be the case, pervades the drama, and thus really animates and creates it. This is the case, however, in the counterpart to Henry VI., which Shakespeare subsequently produced in the most masterly manner, when he portrayed the elevation of the house of Lancaster, in Richard II., Henry IV. and V. We shall there find how Shakespeare made the matter subservient to the idea; in our present play the material is entirely predominant and controlling, and this contrast fully denotes the value of Henry VI., compared to the later works of our poet.

It has been recognized by all that Shakespeare is more himself in Henry IV. than in Henry VI.; in comparing his elaboration of the two last parts of this history we must, however, confess, that he is superior to Marlowe and Greene. In Shakespeare's first attempts at appropriating foreign works to his stage, this superiority was at once perceived by his contemporaries, who cast jealous glances upon the new rival. Two interesting notices with regard to this, the one of a more uncertain character than the other, have been handed down to us from the early years of his activity in London. In a letter from Thomas Nash to the students of both universities (prefixed to Greene's 'Menaphon,' 1589) there is the following passage: 'It is a common practice now a daies amongst a sort of shifting companions, that runne through every arte and thrive by none, to leave the trade of Noverint[1] whereto they were borne, and busie themselves with the indevours of art, that could scarcelie latinize their necke-verse if they should have

[1] The commencement of all contracts and legal documents: *Noverint universi*, &c.

neede; yet English Seneca read by candle-light yeeldes manie good sentences, as *Bloud is a begger*, and so foorth: and if you intreate him faire in a frostie morning, he will affoord you whole *Hamlets*, I should say Handfulls of tragical speaches.' If it could be proved that an early elaboration of Hamlet by Shakespeare existed at that time, there would be no doubt that these sarcasms were intended specially to hit him, and that Nash knew or believed him to have run through the attorney's office. It is *probable* that it referred to him, as Nash was one of those intimate friends of Robert Greene, who was equally irritated against those masterly improvements of Shakespeare, to which the second more certain notice relates. Greene, whom from the following communications we consider to be the first author of the two last parts of Henry VI., died in the year 1592, before which time not only his arrangement of these plays, but Shakespeare's revision of it, must have appeared. The poet left a letter behind him, which his friend Chettle publishes in 1592 according to Greene's own wish, under the title 'A Groatsworth of Wit, bought with a Million of Repentance,' and which was addressed to their mutual dramatic friends, Marlowe, Lodge, and Peele. The dying friend repentingly admonishes them to break off all connection with the stage, and this in the following words: 'Base-minded men all three of you, if by my misery ye be not warned; for unto none of you, like me, sought those burs to cleave; those puppets, I mean, that speak from our mouths, those anticks garnished in our colours. Is it not strange that I, to whom they have all been beholding; is it not like that you, to whom they have all been beholding, shall (were ye in that case that I am now) be both of them at once forsaken? Yes, trust them not! for there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his "*Tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide*," supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and, being an absolute *Johannes Factotum*, is, in his own conceit, the only Shake-scene in a country. Oh! that I might entreat your rare wits to be employed in more profitable courses, and let these apes imitate your past excellence, and never more acquaint them with your admired inventions.' This passage alludes, with a significant play upon the name, to Shakespeare; it speaks of him as an upstart, as a Johannes Factotum, which he may have been to the Blackfriars company, being their only poet. The passage says of him, that he was beautified with 'our feathers,' a proof that these pieces

are composed by all, or by some or one of these poets; for that an appropriation and revision of these pieces are meant, appears from the parodied line, 'O tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide,' taken from the third part of Henry VI. Shakespeare, it appears, complained of this attack. Chettle, the editor of Greene's paper, made an apology it seems as far as Shakespeare was concerned, in a tract entitled 'Kind-heart's Dream.' Among other things it there says that one or two play-makers had taken Greene's letter 'offensively.' It states that he was acquainted with none of them; that he cared not if he ever was acquainted with one of them; and that he had not spared another at the time as much as he had since wished that he had. For he had himself seen that his demeanour was no less civil than he was distinguished in his art. Besides, he adds, 'Divers of worship have reported his uprighteness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his art.' Thus have we here the first testimony which concedes to Shakespeare equal honour in his new career, as a poet, an actor, and a man.

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS AND THE TAMING OF THE SHREW.

If we may venture to number the Comedy of Errors and the Taming of the Shrew among the works of Shakespeare's early period, in which he appears dependent upon foreign originals, we see how the young poet, without any one-sided preference, equally tried his skill, in happy variety, upon all styles and subjects. He had worked at an heroic tragedy in Titus, at a romantic drama in Pericles, at a history in Henry VI.; in the Comedy of Errors he adopted a comedy of intrigue; and in the Taming of the Shrew a comedy in which plot and character equally engaged his attention. That the Taming of the Shrew really belongs to this earliest period, has hitherto been shown only by internal evidence; but the Comedy of Errors, as is proved by an allusion in the piece, was written at the time of the French civil wars against Henry IV. (1589–93), probably soon after 1591, when Essex was sent to the assistance of Henry IV., and it thus indisputably belongs to this early period.

The Comedy of Errors (a designation which, according to Halliwell, subsequently became proverbial,) was, as is known, taken from the 'Menæchmi' of Plautus, which Shakespeare may have read in an English translation, probably by Warner; the book, however, appears to have been written later than Shakespeare's play, and was printed in 1595; and, except as regards the groundwork of the subject, it had in language and execution no sort of similarity with Shakespeare's play. We know that a 'Historie of Errors' had been acted at the English court about the year 1577 and later; possibly this was a remodelling of the 'Menæchmi' of Plautus, which Shakespeare appropriated to himself and his stage. How far our poet's path may have been pre-

pared by this precursor, we cannot of course say. But compared to Plautus, his play is superior both in form and matter; with him it is little more than a farce. Coleridge has even thus called Shakespeare's play, but it appears to us with by no means the same justice. We shall guard ourselves from imputing too profound a philosophy to a comedy the subject of which rests on a series of laughable accidents, lest we should build too massive a structure of explanation upon too light a basis of poetry. Nevertheless, in the Comedy of Errors, that great feature of Shakespearian profoundness, that power of obtaining a deep inner significance from the most superficial material, seems to lie before us in this one early example, in which the fine spiritual application which the poet has extracted from the material strikes us as all the more remarkable, the more coarse and bold the outwork of the plot. The errors and mistakes which arise from the resemblance of the two pairs of twins are carried still farther, and are less probably the work of accident in Shakespeare than in Plautus. In Plautus' play there is only one pair of brothers, one of whom does not even know that they bear the same name, and neither pair knows that they are similar; thus the errors are more simple and possible. In Shakespeare's plot, on the contrary, the father must have told one child of the similarity which he bore to his brother at his birth. From this it certainly need not follow that this same similarity should have been preserved in mature years; but the sameness of name must ever have been prominently before the searching Syracusan; that the people at Ephesus know him and call him by name must have startled and struck him all the more as his recognition in Ephesus is combined with peril of life. To avoid the improbabilities found in the sources from which he drew, is everywhere else an effort which characterises most strikingly Shakespeare's knowledge of human natnre; here, in the plot of the play, there is hardly a trace of this effort to be found. The scene of action, Ephesus, is represented at the very beginning as the corrupt seat of all jugglers and conjurors, mountebanks and cheats; and the good Syracusan Antipholus is driven, by the course of the intricacies which increase in a masterly manner up to the catastrophe, to such straits that he is inclined rather to consider himself bewitched than to arrive at the simple conjecture to which the very object of his journey must again and again have led him.

But whatever skilful management in respect to the plot

may be wanting, this scarcely weighs in the balance when we see how the poet has given the extravagant matter of these mistakes and intricacies an inner relation to the character of the family in which he has placed them. These comic parts appear upon a thoroughly tragic background, which does not interfere at all with the extravagant scenes in the foreground, and perhaps only makes them the more conspicuous, but which nevertheless ever appears with sufficient importance to keep under the superficial and weak impression of a mere farce, the whole substance of which consisted in the mistakes of those similar twins. The hostilities between Syracuse and Ephesus form the farthest chiaroscuro background, upon which the whole picture is drawn, the comic parts of which can scarcely be considered more fascinating and exciting than the tragic. The fate of the imprisoned father who is seeking his lost sons, and who, engaged on a work of love, is condemned to death; whose mental sufferings at last increase to such a degree, that he sees himself unknown by his recovered son and believes himself disowned by him; all this raises the piece far above the character of a mere farce. This tragic part is united with the comic by the most delicate links—links which the poet has interwoven into the transmitted story, according to his subsequent habit, with that totality of his spiritual nature, that we are absolutely left in doubt as to whether he acted from blind instinct or with perfect consciousness. We look upon a double family and its earlier and present destinies, in which the strangest errors take place, not merely of an external, but of an internal character. In this family the strange contrasts of domestic love and a roving spirit are combined; these produce alternate happiness and misfortune; troubles and quarrels arise, in spite of inner congeniality of soul and family attachment, and estrangement and perplexity are occasioned, in spite of outward similarity. In the excellent exposition of the piece, the old Ægeon relates the history of the double birth of the two twins. Before their birth he had left his wife on a visit to Epidamnum; his wife, expecting to become a mother, hastened from Syracuse to join him. The inducement to this journey is left by the poet as a matter of conjecture; this only he has indicated, that if a loving, it was also a wilful step, and it is moreover evident in itself that the step combined at once those contrasting qualities of family affection and love of wandering. Was it the result of suspicion and jealousy—of that quality, which in itself of so contrary a nature, which destroys love, and

yet has its source in love alone? We imagine so; for Æmilia subsequently warns her daughter-in-law so forcibly against this passion. Her twins are born at Epidamnum, and 'not meanly proud of two such boys,' she made, against the will of her husband, 'daily motions for the home return;' during the journey that shipwreck befalls them which separates husband and wife, mother and father, and with each a pair of the twins, their own sons and foster-brothers and future attendants. The Syracusan family, the father and one son, feel again after the lapse of many years the workings of the same family character; the son travels for seven years in quest of his lost mother and brother, although he perceives the folly of seeking a drop in the ocean; similar love, sacrifice, and folly draw the father again after the son; a lively impulse works in them, as in the mother before, to unite the family, and this very impulse separates them more and more, and threatens at length to separate them forcibly and for ever. In the family at Ephesus, between the lost Antipholus with his mother and his wife Adriana, there is another error, the trace of which is to be found already in Plautus' 'Menæchmi.' The wife is a shrew from jealousy; she torments her innocent husband, and robs herself wantonly of his love; her passion leads her to self-forgetfulness and a sacrifice of all that is feminine. And this moral error justly occasions other errors between the two brothers; until at last, by means of the mother Æmilia, the internal dissension is healed and the errors are cleared up, both at once, and with equal satisfaction. The reader feels indeed that these delicately veiled deeper relations invest the adventures and comic parts of the play with too high a value for the piece ever to bear the impression of a mere farce.

It is not impossible that not only an æsthetic emphasis was laid by the poet on the point that the discord of the family arose from jealousy and from the quarrelsome nature of the women, but that a pathological stress was given also to this fact, in consequence of personal sympathy. We advance this merely as a conjecture, upon which we would not place much value; it is also very possible that what strikes us from its unusual concurrence, is mere accident. We have before intimated that, in Shakespeare's early youthful writings especially, the impressions gathered from his own domestic circumstances, which he brought with him to London, seem to glance forth. In Henry VI. he has drawn the characters of the two masculine women, Margaret and Eleanor, more forcibly and with more expressive touches,

than his predecessor; and how eloquently he makes Suffolk, at the close of the first part, in a scene which we conjectured to be his writing, declaim against unloving marriages:

> For what is wedlock forcèd but a hell,
> An age of discord and continual strife?
> Whereas the contrary bringeth forth bliss,
> And is a pattern of celestial peace.

Here, in the Comedy of Errors, he awakens the conscience of the jealous shrew Adriana, when Æmilia lays upon her the blame of the believed madness of her husband, attributing it to her 'venom clamours' and railing, with which she hindered his sleeps and sauced his meat, and gave him over to 'moody and dull melancholy.' In contrast to her he has placed her mild sister, who 'ere she learns love, will practise to obey,' who draws a lesson from examples in the kingdom of nature that the woman is justly subject to the man, and who amid care and trouble procures the maintenance of life. In the Taming of the Shrew, a piece that stands in complete affinity, both in outline and idea, to the Comedy of Errors, Shakespeare describes how the shrew is to be educated on the threshold of marriage, and how she is brought by just discipline to the temper of mind which is natural to the mild Luciana. Her speech at the close of the piece strongly expresses the relation of a wife to her husband, as Shakespeare regarded it. This is quite conformable to the sentiments of that day; to our perverted feelings, it is an exaggerated picture; to the affected homage of the present day to the female sex, it will appear barbarity or irony. All that may seem in this speech of Katherine too energetic and strong, is to be explained by her spirit of contradiction, and the poet, in writing it, may have been spurred by his own bitter experience. It is certainly striking that Shakespeare has never again depicted this sort of unfeminine character in its conjugal relations; it seems as if he desired to disburden himself of his impressions in these pieces, just as he next exhausted his vein of love in a series of love plays. It is certainly possible that these early productions were the result of phases in the poet's personal existence, and that, like Goethe's 'Mitschuldige,' with its repulsive matter, they proceeded from the inner experiences of his own life.

The Taming of the Shrew bears a striking resemblance to the Comedy of Errors, especially in the parts which do not refer to the relation between Petruchio and Katharine. The

Latin school, the mannerism which marked the Italians of the sixteenth century, Ariosto and Machiavelli, in reviving the comedies of Plautus, was justly perceived by Schlegel in this part of the play. This is simply explained by the fact that Shakespeare, in this very part, borrowed essential touches from the 'Suppositi' of Ariosto, which in 1566 were translated into English by Gascoigne. Like the figure of Pinch in the Errors, those of the Pedant and the Pantalon Gremio are pure characters of Italian comedy, and the whole plot of the piece is perfectly carried out in the taste of this school. As in the Comedy of Errors, the long doggrel verse and the language of the old pre-Shakespeare comedy are here pre-eminent, as is the case only a few times besides in his earliest original comedies, the Two Gentlemen of Verona, Love's Labour's Lost, and others, and never happens again in the plays of Shakespeare's riper period. As in the Comedy of Errors, the diction is unequal, and the dialogue often clumsy; there are single passages, on the other hand, equal in good taste and in cleverness of verse and language to the matured style of the poet. As in that comedy, there is little regard paid to the probability of the story and its circumstances. As in the one the Ephesian Dromio, so in the other the little Grumio, is the coarser form of a clown, such as Shakespeare, in his early comedies alone, loves to introduce and to work out. As in the Errors, so here in the part which turns upon Lucentio's wooing of Bianca, the art of characterisation is imperfectly exhibited: the rich old wooer Gremio, the 'narrow prying father' Minola, are superficial characters belonging to all comedies of intrigue; and so too in the Errors there is only a common distinction of character drawn between the violent Ephesian Antipholus, who usually beats his stupid servant, and the milder Syracusan, with whom his witty attendant stands more on the footing of a jester. In both pieces it is striking to remark how the poet lingers among his school reminiscences; no other undisputed play of Shakespeare's furnishes so much evidence of his learning and study as the Taming of the Shrew. In the address of the Syracusan Antipholus to Luciana (Act III. sc. 2), in which he calls her a mermaid, and asks her, 'Are you a god?' there is a purely Homeric tone; the same passage, bearing the same stamp, is met with again in the Taming of the Shrew (Act IV. sc. 5), where Katharine, when she addresses Vincentio, uses a similar passage from Ovid, borrowed by him from Homer,

the antique sound of which lingers even under the touch of a fourth hand. This pervading mannerism of his youthful writings ought long ago to have determined the position of this play as belonging to the earliest period of the poet. All critics have felt this: Malone, Delius, and even Collier, who thought that several hands had been engaged on the piece. Undoubtedly the poet's own hand was more than once employed upon it. In the form in which we now read the piece, it must have been subsequently embellished, as we assume with certainty of other plays. Very significant allusions point to later plays of contemporary poets, and the introduction refers to Fletcher's 'Women Pleased,' a piece not written before 1604. That the name Baptista in the Taming of the Shrew is rightly used as that of a man, and in Hamlet on the contrary as that of a woman, is a proof to Collier that the comedy was written later than Hamlet, in 1601. But whoever considers the refinement with which Shakespeare at this very period, in Much Ado about Nothing, repeated, as it were, in a higher sphere, the two characters of Petruchio and Katherine, will never believe that the same poet at the same time could have originally written this piece.

The principal figure of our comedy (the Shrew) belonged to the favourite subjects of a joyous and laughter-loving age; poems and jests told of shrewish women; in one farce, 'Tom Tiler and his Wife,' the sufferings of an oppressed husband were acted by children, as early as 1569; in Chettle's 'Griseldis,' the episode of the Welsh knight and the shrew whom he marries forms the counterpart to the patient and mild heroine of the piece. There is a 'Taming of *a* Shrew,' written by an unknown hand, and this is the piece upon which Shakespeare founded his own play. The older piece was printed in 1594, when it had already been performed several times; this does not prevent its being older by some time. It was published in a well-known collection by Steevens ('Six Old Plays'). The plot of the piece is much coarser than Shakespeare's; even where the scene is preserved, it is far more clumsy in the original. The scenes of a humorous kind, like those between Katharine and Grumio, and those with the haberdasher and tailor, were for the most part arranged as they have since remained. The contrast between the bombastic pathos of the scenes between the lovers, and the low nature of the burlesque parts, is so great, that here again we may perceive how the poet,

even in his coarser productions, refined everything. There are here single expressions, for which Shakespeare's pen, however indelicate it may appear to the present generation, was at all times too chaste. The comparison of the two plays does not exhibit a relation between them like that of Shakespeare's Henry VI. to Greene's; for the poet, by the pervading improvement of material and form, made the work his own.

We have already intimated that the Taming of the Shrew consists of two contrary parts. The story of the accomplished Lucentio—who, full of students' tricks, comes to Padua at any rate perhaps for the sake of learning, accompanied by a clever servant who is able to change parts with his master, and his shy and skilful wooing of the well-bred Bianca, who is versed in all fine arts—forms a plot of refined design, after the Italian taste. The counterpart to this, the wooing of the coarse Petruchio and the quarrelsome Katherine, is a piece of a genuine popular character. With this latter part, the central point of the play, we shall alone occupy ourselves, in order to see how the poet passes from the shallow delineation of persons, to which we are accustomed in plays of intrigue, to that more profound development of character with which, at a later period, he has indulged us throughout his works.

The scenes between Petruchio and Katherine might be converted into a mere joke, and that of the commonest order. It is sad to think that a man like Garrick has done this. He contracted the piece, under the title of Katherine and Petruchio, into a play of three acts; he expunged the more refined part, the plot for the wooing of Bianca, and he debased the coarse remainder into a clumsy caricature. The acting of the pair was coarsely extravagant, according to the custom which has subsequently maintained its ground; Woodward at the same period acted Petruchio with such fury, that he ran the fork into the finger of his fellow actress (Mrs. Clive), and when he carried her off the stage, threw her down. Thus is the piece still performed in London as a concluding farce, with all disgusting overloadings of vulgar buffoonery, even after the genuine play was again acted at the Haymarket in 1844, and was received with applause.

If all England were to support Garrick, we should confidently maintain that this comedy was not so intended by the poet. The piece is, it is true, treated in a humorous style; the subject, unless it were to fall into pedantic moralizing, could bear

no other handling. Even in common intercourse the question as to the subordination and rule of the wife is ever brought forward in exaggerated jest; coarse humour is required to give the subject its colouring. There is none of the delicate texture of a higher nature in the two leading characters; it must be so, for had they been differently constituted the circumstance could not have taken place. The wooer, Petruchio, is fashioned out of coarse clay; he comes not to Padua as Lucentio does, for the sake of study, but to marry for gold. The rich shrew is offered to him in jest, and he enters upon his courtship in a spirit of good-humoured bravado; this even his Grumio perceives. He has never been of refined nature and habits; he goes about badly dressed; to strike his servants and wring them by the ears on the smallest cause, is common with him; but at the same time he has travelled and is experienced, he has learned to know men and how to handle them. To tame the shrew cannot frighten a man who, with all his manly power, is conscious of understanding the play of jest and flattering gallantry, and who in extreme cases knows that the

> Little fire grows great with little wind,
> Yet extreme gusts will blow out fire and all.

—He is a soldier, huntsman, and sailor—enough of each to develop a rugged character; he is a rigid disciplinarian, unapproachable and imposing. He is compared by Katherine to a crab-apple, and I know not what could be more expressively likened to the hard-skinned muscular faces of soldiers long in service.

Katherine, whom he undertakes to woo, is like a wasp, like a foal that kicks from its halter—pert, quick and determined, but full of good heart; Petruchio already takes pleasure in her nature, because her honest heart overflows in the right place, as in the last act with the widow. Spoilt by her father, she is an ill-behaved child, who cannot crave nor thank; who mistreats her gentler sister, binds her, and beats her. She is excited to the highest pitch of violence by her father's preference for her sister, but principally from envy of the numerous suitors who press round Bianca, whilst she has the prospect of remaining unmarried. She is not one of those beautiful feminine souls who remain unembittered with this prospect and in this lot, and who do not lose the special harmony of the female nature. The key rather to her character and to her

conduct to the ill-mannered suitor, is that she is embittered against her threatening lot, to 'lead apes in hell'—a proverbial humorous expression for the fate of the unmarried, which Beatrice also uses of herself in Much Ado about Nothing. She wishes for a husband, he wishes for gold; thus the way is smoothed to each of them. The old play, that Shakespeare had before him, says plainly that she wished for a husband, and that that is the source of her contention; and Petruchio knows it also, expresses it, and founds upon it his boldness. But it was not Shakespeare's method to express such trivialities: he did not make it so easy for his actors; he left it to their ability to bring into their acting that which was understood of itself. In the wooing scene, all Katherine's words are repulsive and contemptuous; she does not assent, and yet they are afterwards betrothed. This passage has perplexed all actors; it has always been esteemed strange and imperfect; its performance in Garrick's version is quite detestable. But for two clever actors all that the characters demand is given in this scene. He inundates her with words and flatteries, which she has never before heard; when he compares her with Diana, she returns her first calm and quiet answer. The habitual spirit of contradiction makes her coarse and repelling even towards him and his roughness, but as soon as she sees that he is serious the storm subsides within her. The actress who conceives this character in a naïve manner, will at once have gained her point; it *must* be conceived in a naïve manner, not as a shrew by profession, but as a passionate child, who has never laid aside the waywardness of her early years. She must not once for all storm over her part; she should rather stand in droll confusion before the new phenomenon of a suitor; she ought not to make grimaces at the wooer, but to exhibit to him an open countenance, agitated by curiosity and surprise; to look at him with a clear eye, that is not confiding and which yet would willingly confide, that scorns and in the midst of scorn, relaxes. For this naïveté there is full scope given by the poet. Whilst Petruchio overwhelms Katharine with his flatteries, he interweaves all that the bad world says of her; he exaggerates it and affects that she limps; involuntarily she steps firmly forward, in order to convince him of the contrary; upon this he is sarcastic, and immediately she pauses in the spirit of contradiction and confusion. As soon as witnesses come, he affects that she hung about his neck and gave 'kiss

on kiss'; when the actress of Katherine, as is usually the case, resents this, and shows herself unmannerly about it, it is indeed not to be understood how the betrothal can then pass as settled. Whilst he says the decisive words, 'Kiss me, Kate, we will be *married o' Sunday*,' he probably uses the refrain of an old familiar song, which humorously softens the assurance lying in this authoritative wooing. Her answer is that she will see him hanged first, and this can only be said in perfect calmness after the subsided storm; it can only be spoken half inquiringly, half sulkily, showing her at once conquered and resisting. She goes off the stage at the same time with him, without having assented; but she has silently, although contradictorily, agreed. This is the poet's design. She could not indeed answer with a 'Yes,' for she had practised so long only the 'No' of contradiction. Beatrice, in Much Ado about Nothing—a much more delicately designed character—can do so just as little; it belongs naturally to these characters, who are most deeply averse even to the appearance of sentimentality. The suitor facilitates the path in a delicate manner, witnessing to his psychological superiority; he interweaves adroitly that 'tis bargained 'twixt them twain,' that she for a time might continue to play her shrewish part. He seizes her then on another weak side; he goes to Venice 'to buy apparel 'gainst the wedding-day'; she shall be fine at the marriage; she shows indeed, on other occasions, that she is woman enough to care for this. And what the short time of his absence effects and changes in her, she betrays afterwards at his delay with that one sigh, 'Would Katherine had never seen him!'—which is uttered only with lingering passion, tenderly and amid tears, when the father himself expects an outburst of her 'impatient humour.' All this is very skilful, and must be acted skilfully. The matter is coarse, but the structure is full of delicacy, and the actor must of course distinguish the difference; for the task of representing coarseness has to be discharged in a delicate manner.

For the actress of Katharine, the wooing scene is the difficult point; for the actor of Petruchio, the course of the taming. The latter might appear wholly as an exaggerated caricature: but he who is capable of giving it the right humour will impart to this extravagance something of the modesty of nature. In Garrick's farce, when Petruchio comes in extravagant pomp, celebrates an extravagant wedding, and departs in extravagant

haste, all fellow-actors are amazed and frightened. But this is not Shakespeare's design; Grumio finds the whole so droll that he could 'die with laughing.' The manner in which he tames her, however coarse it may appear, is characterized by the same refined method as his wooing. By his departure for Venice, his long absence and his strange appearance, he begins with her a moral discipline, which works by expectation, suspense, and disappointment. Then follows the physical discipline, in order to subdue her rebellious temper. As he had obtained her by stratagem and silenced her by vehemence, so he tames her first by overstraining, and then by restraining her mental and physical nature. The latter part of the treatment is the very method by which falcons are trained, through hunger and watching. But all the privations which he demands from her, he shares with her; he deprives her of sleep and eating under the pretext of love and care for her. If this is performed, as is often the case, in a thoroughly brutal manner, the poet's intention is defeated, for he designed to leave Katharine no cause for resenting the behaviour she met with. In opposition to this, the passage might be alleged, in which Petruchio requires his betrothed to declare the sun to be the moon, but in this passage we may recognize only a skilful test; here the severe discipline evidently passes off in a humorous jest, and a good actor thus comprehends the passage. In England it is perhaps an old tradition, that immediately after this passage in which she has yielded, and at which she shows herself fully cured, having subsequently to mention the sun in an indifferent speech, the actress turns to Petruchio and proffers the word in a roguish tone, as if to ask whether he agrees that the sun is shining. One trait of this kind, interwoven by an intellectual actor, better illuminates whole scenes and characters of Shakespeare's plays than long commentaries. This fine touch smoothes the way to the subsequent pliability of the changed woman, when she at length preaches that lesson of subjection, still a little in the manner of the old defiance, but now directed against the defying.

These, then, are the seven plays which lie at the outset of our poet's career. Let us once more glance over them, that in the survey we may discern the general character which distinguishes them from the later works of Shakespeare. More or

less, all the seven pieces betray the uncultured popular taste of the pre-Shakespeare age, both in matter and form. The barbarities in Titus, the coarseness of Pericles, the occasional severity in Henry VI., the rude character of the two comedies, the treatment of the iambic verse in Titus, and the doggrel verse in the comedies; all these characteristics mark these plays as belonging to that period of English literature when Marlowe and Greene had not been eclipsed by Shakespeare. Previous to these plays, we had known Shakespeare only as the author of descriptive poems. Passing from these to dramas so diversified, we might be led to believe, by the dramatic form and the different material, that we had to do with quite another poet. But this is not the case on closer inspection. There are not lacking, in all these plays, remembrances of the Italian, of that more classical school of poetry which he followed in his descriptive writings. Pericles is derived from those romantic, half antique narrations, in which the poets of the Italian school delighted; from the 'Arcadia' of Sidney, the main representative of this school, many expressions are faithfully copied. In Titus, the Ovid-like voluptuousness of the narrative poems is perceptible in the contents of the second act; at the only opportunity for it in Henry VI., namely in Margaret's farewell to Suffolk, the same tone is for a moment apparent. In the short dialogue between Luciana and Antipholus, in the Comedy of Errors, the thoughtful, antithetical, epigrammatic diction, forcibly recalls to mind the conceits in Lucrece. Last of all, in the Taming of the Shrew, Shakespeare has made use of the comedy of a famed Italian master, just as in the Comedy of Errors he has only revived a later comedy in imitation of the Italian poets. All these plays exhibit the poet not far removed from school and its pursuits; in none of his later dramas does he plunge so deeply into the remembrances of antiquity, his head overflowing with the images, legends, and characters of ancient history. In Titus, as we have already shown, the whole story is composed from mere pieces of ancient legends and histories. Just as in Kyd's 'Spanish Tragedy' there are long passages from Latin poets, so here a stanza from an ode of Horace has been admitted. In Pericles, as in one of Seneca's plays, we have the apparition of Diana, and scenes which strikingly remind us of Ulysses' visit to the Phœacians. In the Comedy of Errors and the Taming of the Shrew we have already pointed out the introductory address in Homer's style.

Like Lucrece and Venus, these pieces are redundant with allusions to Greek mythology and ancient history. In these allusions the Trojan legend stands pre-eminent, and especially Virgil's view of it, as we find it in Lucrece. In the passage where, in Henry VI., he alludes to Diomede and Ulysses, when they 'stole to Rhesus' tents, and brought from thence the Thracian fatal steeds,' we perceive at once how freshly the young poet was imbued with Trojan history. The endeavour to display his learning is not foreign to these pieces, and is not uncharacteristic of a beginner. We will not adduce the first part of Henry VI. in evidence, because the greater part of it is attributed to another writer; otherwise we perceive in it great ostentation of study of the Old Testament, of Roman history, of the Romances of the Paladin, and even of Froissart's Chronicles. But in the second and third part also, in Shakespeare's additions, the quotations from old myths and histories are multiplied, and the manner in which he at one time inserts Machiavelli in the place of Catiline, and at another time Bargulus instead of the pirate Abradas, shows that he purposely sought opportunity to display his own learning. But the Taming of the Shrew, especially, may be compared with the first part of Henry VI. in the manifold ostentation of book-learning. The desire to betray a knowledge of language appears in no subsequent play of Shakespeare's, with the exception of Love's Labour's Lost, in the manner in which it is exhibited in these seven; the scraps of foreign languages which he here uses in thorough earnestness are subsequently only employed as characteristics or in jest. In Titus there are not only isolated Latin passages, as is the case with almost all the pre-Shakespeare poets, but French expressions also are introduced in tragic pathos; in Pericles the devices of the knights are proclaimed in all languages, and among them there is a Spanish one with the error *più* for *mas*. In Henry VI. also, we meet with these scraps in passages which are Shakespeare's property; the old Clifford expires with a French sentence on his lips, the young Rutland with a Latin. In both comedies, moreover, Latin, French, Spanish and Italian words and sentences are accumulated. Thus we see that uncertain and immature forms, coarser taste in the choice of subject and in the manner of working it, the presence of school learning, the leaning to antiquity and to the learned circle of the Italian Romanticists of England, and eagerness to appear well read and

full of knowledge, were the familiar traits which distinguish these early productions of Shakespeare. Even their difference in matter, tone and diction, proceeds from the further familiar characteristic that they are all imitations of older works. The progress of the poet is clear and evident. In the three first plays it is repressed by the weight of foreign influence, and appears therefore in very different fashion; in the second and third part of Henry VI. he wrestles for the palm with a contemporary; in the Comedy of Errors with Plautus; in the Taming of the Shrew he casts away the form of his previous work, and stands upon his own ground. The importance which this training upon other masters and writings exercised on Shakespeare's cultivation is never sufficiently taken into account: the happiest instinct led the proud genius upon this modest path. No talent is more to be mistrusted than that which, in early youth, aims at originality; self-conceit guides it upon this mistaken way, and want of nature will be the end at which it arrives. Every great artist has had such a period of training, in which he has trusted in an earlier master, in which he has chained himself to a foreign model, in order to learn from him. The scholar who in this devotedness loses his independence, and surrenders himself to imitation, would certainly never have found out a way of his own. But true talent, during the apprenticeship of youth, only penetrates into the foreign mind, that it may, from the deepest knowledge of it, learn more acutely the difference of its own and separate itself with greater independence. Thus Raphael and Titian, thus Goethe and Schiller, first practised their skill on foreign masters; the latter even on our Shakespeare himself. And thus did *he* also. He looked up to Plautus and Seneca, early and late, and free from every pretension; perhaps at first even to Marlowe and Greene. With these he certainly must soon have felt that he could only learn what he should *not* do; he improved the plays of Greene, while he elaborated them; he was reproached by Greene with having beautified himself with foreign feathers, but he was himself conscious that in his turn he had invested them with ornament. The custom of that day that the poets of the different theatres borrowed their materials from each other, and worked them up afresh, was extraordinarily advantageous to the drama. From the gains and losses of other stages the favourite subjects of the public were known, and in this manner they were rarely mistaken in

the matter. Many hands were then engaged upon the same work; their elaborations were subject to the verdict of the public; the subject and its signification, the characters and their treatment, were thus refined. This was the case also with the ancient drama. In that youth of the world there were few dramatic subjects, mythical or historical, existing at all; on each of these few every famous poet tried his skill; these continued attempts ripened at last into the pure form, which we admire in the Greek tragedies. Something of a similar but superficial character happened on the English stage; though here in the richer and more extensive works of modern taste, it would have been all the more necessary that the same should nave taken place, and that even more fundamentally. But with Shakespeare we can remark plainly and progressively, how in the earlier dramas which he undertook to elaborate, he ever learned, in a masterly manner, to reject more of the shell, and to penetrate into the kernel of the subject and its inmost soul. This art he afterwards transferred even to his epic narrative sources, and he learned to give to the most superficial and frivolous story a psychological and moral depth.

SECOND PERIOD OF SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMATIC POETRY.

We pass from the first period of the dramatic career of our poet, in which he appears only as the elaborator of foreign works, to a second, which we confine to the years between 1592 and 1600. In this short time the poet rises with almost inconceivable activity from the scholar to the master, and passes through a mental history of the most remarkable kind, although we possess only hints and conjectures for determining its nature more closely. We cannot read the works of these years without receiving an impression, for the most part, that the poet was passing through a happy and buoyant period when he wrote them. The untroubled gladness and the playful wantonness which meet us in all the comedies of this period, and the exuberance of mind which bursts forth in Henry IV., easily allow us to infer as much inward self-reliance as outward ease on the part of the poet. We shall also subsequently find, when we return from the consideration of the works of this epoch to the history of Shakespeare's life, that his rapid success as an actor and poet, his importance in higher society, his honourable connections and friendships, and a prosperous outward condition which enabled him to relieve his parents effectually in their necessity; that all these manifest a series of favourable circumstances adapted to place the young poet in the happy mood, in which his talent could so quickly and so immeasurably advance. At the end of this period a shadow seems, cast over this happiness, which gave Shakespeare an impetus towards more serious contemplation and a still deeper penetration into human life. It is striking, that while between 1590 and 1600 comedy prevailed over tragedy, in the series of his writings after that

period tragedy and the serious drama appear, on the contrary, just as decidedly in the ascendant; and this very contrast obliges us to date from it a third period of Shakesperian poetry.

The works of this period are each in themselves significant and great; the group, considered as a whole, presents a specially remarkable appearance from the vast many-sidedness which appears in the subjects treated of. They are divided into three parts, distinguished by their innermost nature. In the commencement of this period we meet with a series of plays of essentially erotic purport, the central point of which is formed by the passions and the deeds of love: namely the Two Gentlemen of Verona, Love's Labour's Lost, All's Well that Ends Well, Midsummer-Night's Dream, and Romeo and Juliet. Side by side with these lie all the historical plays but one which Shakespeare produced after Henry VI.; dramas of dry, realistic matter, the world of outer life and action placed as if in intentional contrast to that of feeling and opposed to it in equal extent and with equal emphasis: namely, Richard II. and III., King John, Henry IV. and V. At the close of this period lies a third group of comedies closely clustered together; comedies in which Shakespeare, in the gladdest freedom and joyfulness of mind, raised this branch of art to the highest degree of perfection, maintaining its cheerful character pure and untroubled; thus making the sudden transition to the tragedies, in the third period of his poetry, all the more interesting. It is not possible with perfect certainty to assign to each of these works the year of its origin; but, according to the concurring judgment of all critical authorities, they fall collectively within the period mentioned, or very little beyond it. Historical plays and love plays were alternately elaborated by the poet; the historical in no chronological series, but just as the liking for the subject suggested them. In the discussion of these works, therefore, we shall not bind ourselves too scrupulously to the order of time, but at once carry on the three series in their great divisions, and then examine and consider each single work separately, adhering as far as possible to the probable chronology, if any thread may be perceived which indicates to us, in addition to its date, another order of thoughts and feelings.

LOVE-PLAYS.

We will first speak of the series of love-plays, in which Shakespeare has more or less exclusively represented the essence and nature of love. All the above-named pieces are of this kind, whilst in Shakespeare's later dramas it is only in true comedies that love adventures form the central point, and this indeed only of the plot, and no longer as here, at the same time, the very substance of the piece; whilst in his tragedies, they are only introduced so far as they represent, in the great varieties of life itself, but one side of our existence. With our own German poets, even the greatest, this side of our being occupies far too wide a space, and must detract much from the wealth of their poetry, as compared with Shakespeare's works. They felt nothing of that natural impulse of the English poet to establish themselves in the great sphere of active life, that is in history, in order to counterbalance the life of sentiment. Where they have interwoven a love affair as an episode in an historical play, the preference for the sentimental part prevailed, and the poetic brilliancy and energy centred in it. Shakespeare's words in Love's Labour's Lost may be almost universally applied to this sentimental poetry:

> Never durst poet touch a pen to write,
> Until his ink were tempered with love's sighs.

But this was not the case with our poet. We may conclude, from the circumstances of Shakespeare's life, that in his youth he may have been for a while that which in Love's Labour's Lost, and the Two Gentlemen of Verona, he calls the 'votary to love;' and this was indeed the very period in which he created the love-pieces which we shall next consider. But it was at all events only a period, a passing time, in which he was personally swayed by this passion, and poetically engaged with it; and to this poetic occupation he in no wise surrendered himself entirely; but he took care, as we have said, in the happiest instinct of a many-sided nature, to maintain the just balance in his descriptions of the powerful life of feeling, by the contemplation of the great historical world of action.

If we loose sight of this grand double-sidedness, if we become

entirely and solely absorbed in the love-pieces of this period, we find even in this exclusive view of the matter that he treated his theme quite otherwise to our German poets. The ideal love heroes of our own Schiller, and the weak sensual characters of our Goethe, are, from that sentimental element which is infused throughout the love-poetry of a modern date, of one uniform colouring; on our stage therefore, there is one fixed character of a lover, which the player to whom it is committed acts nearly always in the same manner. It was not thus in Shakespeare's time, and his works are not so designed. The vast theme, the passion of love, is treated by Shakespeare in a far grander manner. He depicted it not alone in reference to itself, but in the most manifold combination with other passions, and in the most widespread relations to other human circumstances; it is to him a necessity in those first five plays which we find devoted to this theme, to represent it in the greatest fulness and variety possible, in its entire existence, in all its operations, in its good and its bad qualities. He shows us, in the Two Gentlemen of Verona, how it fares with a man who abandons himself wholly to this passion, and also its effect upon the energetic character still a stranger to it. He shows, in Love's Labour Lost, how a set of youthful companions unnaturally endeavour to crush it by ascetic vows, and how the effort avenges itself. He shows, in All's Well that Ends Well, how love is despised by manly haughtiness and pride of rank, and how it overcomes this by fidelity and devotion. He shows, in the Midsummer-Night's Dream, in a marvellous allegory, the errors of blind unreasonable love, which transports man into a dream-life, devoid of reflection. He shows lastly, in that great song of love, in Romeo and Juilet, how this most powerful of all passions seizes human beings in its most fearful power, and how, enhanced by natures favourable to its reception and by circumstances inimical to it, it is carried to an extent in which it overstrains and annihilates itself. And when the poet, having advanced to this extreme point, has measured this side of human nature, in its breadth and depth, he returns back to himself, as it were, personally unconcerned, and in his later works he does not readily again permit it such a wide and exclusive space.

This many-sidedness of love and its manifold bearings and effects upon human nature, Shakespeare alone, of all poets and of all ages, has depicted in its full extent. If we glance at the whole epic and dramatic poetry of France, Italy and Spain, we

shall find all the relations of love treated to tediousness after the same model and idea. This mannerism was a transmission from the Middle Ages, when knightly customs and gallantry first gave a spiritual beauty to sensual desire, and an extravagant adoration of women, unknown to the ancients, penetrated life and poetry. In this period love was regarded as a source of civilisation, as a source even of power and action; and the poetic generations of succeeding times conceived it only from this its ennobling side, and this with a preference and exclusiveness which such a judge of life as Shakespeare could not share. He had moreover experienced its shadow-side: how it is just as capable of paralysing the power of action, of endangering morals, and of plunging a man in destruction and crime, as of tending to purity of life, and of ennobling mind and spirit. Shakespeare had penetrated in his early youth this double nature and two-fold worth of love and its effects. In Venus and Adonis, his first poem, the goddess after the death of her favourite utters a curse upon love, which contains in the germ, as it were, the whole development of the subject, as Shakespeare has unfolded it in the series of his dramas. It is worth while to hear the passage in its whole extent.

Since thou art dead, lo! here I prophesy,
Sorrow on love hereafter shall attend:
It shall be waited on with jealousy,
Find sweet beginning, but unsavoury end;
Ne'er settled equally, but high or low,
That all love's pleasure shall not match his woe.

It shall be fickle, false, and full of fraud;
Bud, and be blasted in a breathing-while;
The bottom poison, and the top o'erstrawed
With sweets, that shall the truest sight beguile:
The strongest body shall it make most weak,
Strike the wise dumb, and teach the fool to speak.

It shall be sparing, and too full of riot,
Teaching decrepit age to tread the measures
The staring ruffian shall it keep in quiet,
Pluck down the rich, enrich the poor with treasure:
It shall be raging mad, and silly mild,
Make the young old, the old become a child.

It shall suspect, where is no cause of fear;
It shall not fear, where it should most distrust;
It shall be merciful, and too severe,
And most deceiving, when it seems most just;
Perverse it shall be, where it shows most toward
Put fear to valour, courage to the coward.

> It shall be cause of war, and dire events,
> And set dissension 'twixt the son and sire;
> Subject and servile to all discontents,
> As dry combustious matter is to fire.

We must remember that this was written at an age, which in the first strength of feeling generally regards love only in the brightest light, and that it is placed in a poem which appeared to deify sensual desire in the usual manner of young poets; we must, I say, remember the period and the position of this passage, in order rightly to appreciate its value and importance. In the love-pieces of the period, which we shall consider, these thoughts are variously repeated on more forcible occasions, and appear in choice sentences and passages; and far more than this, throughout Shakespeare's works, they are also exhibited and embodied in characters, circumstances, and living images, with a fulness and depth such as never has been the case with any other poet. And not alone, in opposition to all usual poetry, is the curse of love portrayed in these pictures; but its richest blessing is unfolded in an equal number of counter-pieces, with just as much ardour and with the same life. That in this passion the rich covetous man is 'plucked down' and deceived, the poor man elevated and enriched, appears in the Merchant of Venice. That it makes a simpleton of the spendthrift, a ruffian of the weak, is represented in Rodrigo. That it affects the wise, and that it is hardly united with reason and reflection, is brought before us in Measure for Measure. That it teaches fools to speak and makes the old young, in how many excellent caricatures has this been displayed by the burlesque parts of Shakespeare's comedies! That it selects the 'finest wits,' and often makes them its prey, is expressed in that graceful, oft-repeated image, that 'in the sweetest bud the eating canker dwells;' and again in other pictures, as in the Tempest, the most charming innocence is seized by this spirit, without being even slightly injured in its stainless purity. That it is 'fickle, false, and full of fraud,' that it forswears itself, that the strongest of love's 'oaths are straw to the fire of the blood,' is exhibited in the Two Gentlemen of Verona; at the same time, however, we are shown that true love, full of inner beauty, shames the fickleness of the unfaithful by deeds of sacrifice. The basest and the most exalted phases of this fierce passion are to be found in

Troilus and Cressida, in the highly ironical picture of the Trojan contest, in the parody of the immortal song on that love which was the cause of so long a war and of such frightful deeds. Then again, in contrast to this excited drama, we have a thoroughly spiritual picture: how love quickens the senses and the spirits, how it is the creator and the created of fancy, and the perpetual subject and the source of poetry; in what charming touches and symbols is this interwoven with the magic pictures of the Midsummer-Night's Dream! How love surprises the man in idleness, when the character is relaxed in inactivity, how it fills his whole being and alters his very nature, is represented in Romeo, in Proteus, and in Antony; in Othello, however, the heroic nature does not permit love to enchain him by idle pleasures, and 'with wanton dulness' to foil 'his speculative and active instruments.' That jealousy is the attendant of love, exciting suspicion where there is no cause for it, and fearing nothing where there is ground for mistrust, is the subject of this same tragedy of Othello, and of the Winter's Tale; that on the other hand, this 'green-eyed monster' may be overcome by a harmonious nature and confiding trust, is developed in strong contrast in the story of Posthumus and Imogen. That love is shared by high and low, that it may begin with bitterness and end with sweetness, is well depicted in All's Well that Ends Well; but the main theme of the curse of the goddess of love, that 'all love's pleasure shall not match his woe,' that it 'finds sweet beginning, but unsavoury end,' that it has 'the bottom poison, and the top o'erstrawed with sweets,' that it 'buds, and is blasted in a breathing-while,' that violent in kind it leads to desperate resolutions, and spends itself like a lightning flash—this is immortally sketched in the poem of Romeo and Juliet. The whole theme, which other poems and poets have broken into such manifold parts, is here comprised in one exuberant production. That love in all its power is in constant fatal struggle with class-prejudice and propriety, has been the central point at all times of all tragic portrayals of love, in life and poetry. 'Love's not love when 'tis mingled with respects:' this is the mark by which nature and the poet denote the passion in its greatest power; in this its strength, the conflict of nature against custom, of all-powerful boundless feeling against the necessary restraints of social life, is unavoidable; and in this

collision the tragical nature of this passion is grounded—a passion which no poet has ever depicted as Shakespeare has done in Romeo and Juliet, with such surpassing repose and yet lively emotion, with such excitement and yet moral ingenuousness, and with such fervour of personal experience and yet mental impartiality. 'It is the only play,' the cold Lessing declared, 'which love itself, as it were, helped to write.'

THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

In accordance with most English critics, we place the Two Gentlemen of Verona first in the series of the love-plays of this period. It is generally assigned to 1591, a date previous to the Comedy of Errors. The single long doggrel verses in the burlesque parts, the repeated alliteration, and the numerous lyric passages in the sonnet-style of tender but undramatic poetry, place the piece in the poet's earliest period. The two styles of comedy are not separately introduced here as in the Taming of the Shrew, but they are blended. The action calls to mind in its main part the history of Felix and Felismena (in the 'Diana' of Montemayor), which may have been known to Shakespeare from an earlier dramatic handling of the subject (the 'History of Felix and Philomena' 1584), or from the MS. of the translation of the 'Diana' by Bartholomew Yonge, not printed before 1598; the plot is somewhat poor and slight: but the traits of delicate characterisation, on the other hand, begin here, almost for the first time, to stand forth in that fulness which is not apparent in the characters of the seven merely elaborated plays, with the exception perhaps of Petruchio and Katharine in the Taming of the Shrew.

The piece treats of the essence and the power of love, and especially of its influence upon judgment and habit generally, and it is not well to impute to it a more defined idea. The twofold nature of love is here at the outset exhibited with that equal emphasis and that perfect impartiality which struck Goethe so powerfully in Shakespeare's writings. The poet facilitated the solving of this double problem by an æsthetic artifice peculiar to himself, which we find especially evident in this youthful work, and which we see repeated in almost all his dramas. The structure and design of the play are carried out in a strict parallelism; the characters and events are so exactly placed in relation and contrast to each other that not only

those of a similar nature, but even those of a contrary one, serve mutually to explain each other. Upon this point we shall lay the chief stress in our discussions.

Two friends, Valentine and Proteus, are separating in the first scene. The names have already a significance, which hints at their opposite characters. Valentine, a good honest nature, is a man of action; urged by honour to go out into the world and into military and courtly service, he is travelling to Milan; he belongs to the simple and plain kind of country-gentlemen, with no finely-sifted speech; with him heart and lips are one; his generosity knows no doubt; himself good, he deems the bad good also; his nature is not soon affected by any emotion, his acts are not disturbed by reflections. A golden friend, ready for every great sacrifice, he has yet never known affection for the other sex; on the contrary, his derision is provoked by the absorbing passion of his more excitable friend. Proteus, on the other hand, is a man of reflection, full of attractive virtues and faults, and of great mental capability. It is said of him that 'of many good he is the best;' this goodness is exhibited throughout the piece (and this is a decided error) not in deeds, but only in the superiority of his talents. Entirely given up to love, completely filled with its desires and aspirations, he accuses himself of spending his days in 'shapeless idleness;' thirsting for love as he is, he is in danger through selfishness and self-pleasing of renouncing his manly character; he appears as a youth of that young and tender wit, which like 'the most forward bud is eaten by the canker ere it blow.' The one-sidedness of each character is now to find its complement, as it were, as a corrective. Proteus in the midst of his successful suit, is, to his despair, sent by his father to Valentine in Milan, in order like him to be 'tutored in the world;' on the other hand Valentine's original bent for 'active deeds' meets with penance, as he himself calls it in Act II., sc. 4, from the fact that in Milan, Silvia, the duke's daughter, falls in love with him. In the case of Valentine this new condition brings an increase of experience and refinement, which he appropriates after his own fashion; in that of Proteus the change causes a restraint, against which his self-loving nature struggles. The way in which both behave in this change of situation is developed in the finest manner from the original disposition of their characters. The honest, unsuspecting Valentine, occupied with manly dealings, must be sought after by love, if love is to

touch him; the daughter of the duke, above all others, is able to fascinate him as an object which at the same time excites his aspiring ambition. But, as we should expect from him, he acts like a novice in the work of love; he betrays his increasing inclination by open 'gazing' noticeable by all, and by imperious offensive treatment of his rival Thurio. When she meets his modesty half-way and wooes him in her letter, he understands her not, and his servant Speed is obliged to explain her intention. His wont when he laughed to crow like a cock, when he walked to walk like one of the lions, is now passed away; his friend Proteus might now find matter for ridicule in the metamorphosis which love has effected. Since difference of position places obstacles to a union, with his peculiar want of consideration and readiness for action he enters on a plan for eloping with Silvia; instead of guarding himself from the snares of the duke, unsuspicious and confident he proceeds to entangle himself still further. When his plan of elopement has been punished with banishment, he surrenders himself passively and unhesitatingly to a band of outlaws; desperation urges him, the active life suits him, and the man who invites his company touches his heart by the similar fate which he too has suffered. Such is the extremity to which the treachery of his friend has driven him. For Proteus, as soon as he had arrived at Milan, had at once forgotten his Julia. His love is, first and foremost, self-love. Completely absorbed in this one affection, arrived at Milan, and separated from Julia, his weak, love-seeking nature cannot endure for a moment the unusual void and desolation. Just as Romeo, rejected by his beloved, falls all the more violently in love with a new object, so does Proteus, when separated from Julia; he casts his eye on the beloved of his friend, and giving way to this one error, he falls from sin to sin, and runs the gaunlet of crime. Once befooled by the intoxication of the senses, he uses the finest sophistry to justify and to excuse his misdeeds. False and wavering, he forgets his oath to Julia, he ensnares the duke, he betrays his friend, he goes so far in baseness that he proposes slander as a means for making Silvia forget Valentine, and he himself undertakes the office of slanderer. His behaviour towards his rival Thurio shows what a judge he is of love, with what power he practices the arts of love, and how secure and victorious he knows himself compared to such an adversary. He teaches him the

secrets of love, well knowing that he understands them not; he, a poet himself, enjoins him to woo Silvia by 'wailful sonnets,' when he knows that he can only fashion miserable rhymes. In the amorous style of the three lovers, the poet has given us an excellent insight into their capacity for love. In the verses of Thurio we see a few paltry insipid rhymes, which German translators have too confidently received as a specimen of the genuine Shakespearian lyric. The poet possesses true poetry enough not to fear putting silly verses in the lips of the silly wooer, and thus, whilst he intentionally inserts a poem of no merit, he acquires the further merit of characterization. The poem which Valentine addresses to Silvia (Act III. sc. 1) is of the same characteristic kind; composed in the usual conceit-style of love, it evidences tolerable awkwardness of rhyming talent, and is rather the work of the brain than the outpouring of excited feeling. Of Proteus' poem, we have only fragments and scattered words, which Julia imparts to us from his torn letter: 'kind Julia—love-wounded Proteus—poor, forlorn Proteus, passionate Proteus, to the sweet Julia'—words sufficient to tell us that among the three this is the man who understands the true rhetoric of love. With this letter he had taken by storm the free heart of the unguarded, unsuspecting Julia; but so well does he understand the strategy of love, that towards Silvia, whose heart was given to Valentine, he needed more studied tactics; and for this reason he seizes every opening, procures himself helpers and allies in the father and the rival, and endeavours to insinuate himself by the cunning of slander. He has reckoned every point but that of a woman's character, which has as much masculine power about it as his own has feminine weakness.

The two loved ones stand in reversed contrast to the two lovers. The fair Julia, the friend of Proteus, is just as much a pure womanly nature as Valentine is a pure manly one. Chaste, reserved, observing the strictest modesty, she must be sought by Proteus, and will hardly allow him to seek her; she will not believe her Lucetta, that 'fire that is closest kept burns most of all,' for she has not yet gained the experience, which she subsequently expresses in almost the same words. When Proteus' love first finds a hearing, she remains in her quiet thoughtful life the same sweet being; at the moment of farewell her full heart finds not a word. But separated from Proteus, she experiences like Valen-

tine the change in her whole being; the energy and vehemence of his passion are kindled in herself, just as Silvia's giddy desire for flight is in Valentine. She undertakes a journey after the man of her heart, she dreams of Elysium at the end of it, at that point at which she is to be awakened from her dream by the faithlessness of Proteus. She is not to be restrained by the consideration that the step may 'make her scandalized.' She feels in herself that the purest and most guiltless love endures most heavily the hindrances in its path. The beloved of Valentine is exhibited in as great a contrast to this gentle creature, as Proteus is to Valentine. The auburn-haired Silvia, rash and reckless, steps somewhat beyond the sphere of a woman's nature; she is less tender than Valentine and Julia, and more intellectual and clever, like the scheming Proteus; teazingly she delights in putting off Thurio and in deriding him; she possesses that ready wit, with which Shakespeare has invested all his bolder prominent female characters. She herself makes advances to Valentine, she perceives the hopelessness of their love, and contrives a plan for flight; she sees through Proteus and his tissue of faithlessness; she abandons at last her position and her father to follow Valentine, and, observant of human nature and certain of success, she chooses in Eglamour a companion in whose faith and honour she can repose, who himself has loved and has lost his beloved.

The plot is unravelled at length by a romantic meeting of all, in a conclusion which appears to all critics sudden, abrupt, and inartistic. It is undeniable that here the form of the plot is carelessly treated. We must, however, be cautious not to criticise rashly. For, in a pathological point of view, the catastrophe has been most attacked just where it is most to be defended. It is, namely, essentially brought about by the offer of Valentine to sacrifice his beloved one to his faithless friend. This Charles Lamb and many others considered an unjustifiable act of heroic friendship. But this trait essentially belongs to Valentine's character. That it was not unintentionally introduced may also be traced from the mere parallelism observed throughout the composition. For Julia also is exhibited to us in the same aspect of resignation and self-renunciation springing from pure good-nature, which in her as in Valentine stands out in contrast to the self-love of Proteus. She enters Proteus' service as a page, she delivers his messages to Silvia with the intention of playing the fox as 'shepherd of his lambs,' but Silvia so attracts

her, that her hostile intention is at once disarmed. Valentine, subjected to the most violent alternation of feeling, with a nature quick to perceive and quicker to act, is in this scene of the catastrophe wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement. Longer and more united to his friend than to Silvia, and according to his nature not comprehending the base in one whom he had believed to be noble, this same man, who immediately afterwards in the presence of the duke threatens the hated Thurio with death, has no wrath, no revengeful feeling against his friend, even when he learns his treachery and sees him place 'rude uncivil touch' upon Silvia. Nothing but the bitter sigh of disappointment escapes him: 'I am sorry, I must never trust thee more, but count the world a stranger for thy sake.' Of the possession of Silvia, the outlaw may not think; to win back his repentant friend, the noble-minded man offers his greatest sacrifice. His feelings, according to his nature, overcome him at the outset; Proteus, on the contrary, sees a way out of his errors from a remark of Julia's, which speaks rather to his head than to his heart, and goads with cutting reproof his sense of honour far more than his feeling.

All this indeed is finely designed, full of striking traits of character, and all from one fount. Compared to Shakespeare's later works, it is nevertheless of a lighter kind; it is, however, important enough to outweigh whole opera omnia of our Romanticists, who ventured to blame their hero-poet in this play, imagining that the love-phrases were intended to represent love, and the heroic-phrases heroism. This was Franz Horn's criticism; Tieck made another observation, which proves to us on examination no less superficial. He considered that the low comic scenes, the heroes of which are the servants Speed and Launce, are not connected with the subject, but are intended only to excite laughter. In this manner, as we have before seen, the poets previous to Shakespeare worked at the burlesque parts of their dramas, in order to meet the taste of the vulgar. The case is similar also in Shakespeare's early attempts, such as the Comedy of Errors and the Taming of the Shrew, where the Dromios and Grumios, with their coarse jests, form an outwork of no importance, in so far as they have no influence as active characters upon the intricacies of the plot. This, however, is altered in the Two Gentlemen of Verona; and ever after Shakespeare, obeying the necessity in which he saw himself placed of satisfying in some measure the rough taste of a laughter-loving

public, seized that skilful expedient to which we have also before alluded: he gave henceforth to his lower comic parts a close reference to the main actions of the piece. Not alone are the servants Speed and Launce placed in characteristic opposition to their masters, the witty Speed to the simple Valentine, the awkward Launce to the clever Proteus; not alone are they stationed by the side of their masters as disinterested observers, to whose extreme simplicity that is apparent which in the infatuation of passion escapes the understanding of the wise; so that Speed perceives the love of Silvia before his master, and even the simple Launce sees through the knavish tricks of his lord; but they are also by actions of their own placed as a parody by the side of the main action, in a manner which invests even the commonest incidents with a high moral value. Launce's account of his farewell may be regarded as a parody of Julia's silent parting from Proteus; the scene in which Speed 'thrusts himself' into Launce's love affairs and 'will be swinged for it,' caricatures the false intrusion of Proteus into Valentine's love; but a deeper sense still lies in the stories of the rough Launce and his dog Crab, the very scenes which undoubtedly occur to the gentler reader as the most offensive. To the silly semi-brute fellow, who sympathizes with his beast almost more than with men, his dog is his best friend. He has suffered stripes for him, he has taken his faults upon himself, and has been willing to sacrifice everything to him. At last, self-sacrificing like Valentine and Julia, he is willing to resign even this friend; he is ready to abandon his best possession to do a service to his master. With this capacity for sacrifice, this simple child of nature is placed by the side of Proteus—that splendid model of manly endowments, who, self-seeking, betrayed friend and lover. This fine relation of the lower to the higher parts of the piece is moreover so skilfully concealed by the removal of all moralizing from the action, that the cultivated spectator of the play finds the objective effect of the action in no wise disturbed, while the groundling of the pit tastes unimpeded his pure delight in common nature.

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST AND ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

THE comedy of Love's Labour's Lost belongs indisputably to the earliest dramas of the poet, and will be almost of the same date as the Two Gentlemen of Verona. The peculiarities of Shakespeare's youthful pieces are perhaps most accumulated in this play. The reiterated mention of mythological and historical personages; the air of learning, the Italian and Latin expressions, which here, it must be admitted, serve a comic end; the older England versification, the numerous doggrel verses, and the rhymes more frequent than anywhere else and extending over almost the half of the play; all this places this work among the earlier efforts of the poet. Alliteration, a silent legacy from Anglo-Saxon literature, and much more in use in the popular and more refined poems of England than in any other language, is to be met with here still more than in the narrative poems, the sonnets, and the Two Gentlemen of Verona; it is expressly employed by the pedant Holofernes, who calls the art 'to affect the letter.' The style is frequently like that of the Shakespeare sonnets; indeed the 127th and 137th of Shakespeare's sonnets bear express similarities to those inserted here as well as to other passages of the play (Act IV. sc. 3). The tone of the Italian school prevails more than in any other play. The redundancy of wit is only to be compared with the similar redundancy of conceit in Shakespeare's narrative poems, and with the Italian style in general, which he at first adopted.

This over-abundance of droll and laughter-loving personages, of wits and caricatures, gives the idea of an excessively jocular play; nevertheless everyone, on reading the comedy, feels a certain want of ease, and, on account of this very excess, cannot enjoy the comic effect. In structure and management of subject it is indisputably one of the weakest of the poet's

pieces; nevertheless we divine a deeper meaning in it, not readily to be perceived, and which it is difficult to explain. No source is known for the purport of the piece, which, however (as Hunter has proved from Monstrelet's 'Chronicles'), in the one point of the payment of France to Navarre (Act II. sc. 2), rests on an historical fact, namely an exchange of territory between the two crowns; the poet, who scarcely ever aspired after the equivocal merit of inventing his stories himself, seems according to this to have himself devised the matter, which suffers from a striking lack of action and characterisation. The whole turns upon a clever interchange of wit and asceticism, jest and earnest; the shallow characters are forms of mind, rather proceeding from the cultivation of the head than the will; throughout there are affected jests, high-sounding and often empty words, but no action; nevertheless we feel that this deficiency is no unintentional error, but that there is an object in view. There is a motley mixture of fantastic and strange characters, which for the most part betray no healthy groundwork of nature; and yet the poet himself is so sensible of this, that we might trust him to have had his reason for placing them together—a reason worth our while to seek. And indeed we find, on closer inspection, that this piece has a more profound character, in which Shakespeare's capable mind already unfolds its power. We recognise this as the first of his plays in which, as in all his subsequent works, he has had one single moral aim in view—an aim that here lies even far less concealed than in others of his work.

We will start with the observation with which we concluded the Two Gentlemen of Verona: namely, that Shakespeare did not disdain to retain the favourite subjects, characters, and jests of the older low comedy, but that he knew how to dignify these by the profound signification which he gave them. This is attested in this play by a much more brilliant example than in the Two Gentlemen of Verona. In the burlesque parts of Love's Labour's Lost we meet with two favourite characters or caricatures of the Italian comedy: the *Pedant*, that is the schoolmaster and grammarian, and the military *Braggart*, the Thraso of the Latin, the 'Captain Spavento' of the Italian stage. These stereotyped characters are depicted by Shakespeare with such life, that it has been supposed, and it has been endeavoured to be proved, that the poet portrayed in them persons living at the time, in Armado, 'a vain fantastical man'

of the name of Monarcho (thus he once calls him), and in Holofernes, the Italian teacher Florio in London. The characteristics of both are exaggerated, as they could only be in the rudest popular comedy. Armado, the military braggart in the state of peace, as Parolles is in war, appears in the ridiculous exaggeration and affectation of a child of hot Spanish imagination, assuming a contempt towards everything common; boastful but poor, a coiner of words but most ignorant, solemnly grave and laughably awkward, a hector and a coward, of gait majestical and of the lowest propensities. The schoolmaster Holofernes appears among the many enamoured characters of the comedy as a dry inanimate pedant, an imaginary word-sifter, a poor poet of the school of the Carmelite Mantuan, fantastically vain of his empty knowledge. Both caricatures become still more distorted when they are seen by the light of the contrast which the poet has placed beside them: to the stiff, weak, melancholy Armado is opposed the little Moth, who, light as his name, is all jest and playfulness, versatility and cunning; the pedant Holofernes is placed in opposition to Costard the child of nature, whose common sense ridicules the scholar who lives 'on the alms-basket of words.' The two characters, we see, are caricatures, taken from simple nature, exhibited in their effort to attract attention, in their ostentation, vanity, and empty thirst for fame, based upon an appearance of knowledge and a show of valour.

But these two originals, and their gross desire for glory, have been associated by Shakespeare with a society of finer mould, suffering from the same infirmity, only that, from their mind and culture, the poison lies deeper concealed. The court of Navarre had for three years devoted itself to study and retirement; the young king, seized with an ascetic turn, in the spirit of the courts of love and the vow-loving chivalry of those regions, desires that his young courtiers should join him in changing the court and its revels into an academy of contemplation, in mortifying their passions and worldly desires, and in renouncing for the time all intercourse with women. He is in the same danger of erring from a vain desire for glory; he wishes to make Navarre a wonder of the world. The piece begins somewhat in Armado's style with the king's majestic words:

> Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,
> Live registered upon our brazen tombs,
> And then grace us in the disgrace of death.

In his company is Dumain, 'a well-accomplished youth, of all that virtue love, for virtue loved,' endowed with the power but not with the will to 'do harm,' and stoical enough to choose subsequently the disfigured Katharine among the French ladies; this Dumain is placed near the king, as most ready and able to enter into his abstemious resolve. But Biron and the tall versatile Longaville, of kindred mind and equal wit, seriously oppose the romantic plan. Biron, who had ever been 'love's whip,' believes that on this point he is able to obey the proposed laws as well as any; so much the more he feels himself justified in warning against playing with oaths that may be broken, as 'young blood will not obey an old decree.' An Epicurean, accustomed to good food and sleep, he turns indignantly from the desolate task of mortification; he calls all delight vain,

> But that most vain,
> Which, with pain purchased, doth inherit pain.

His more frivolous nature disdains most of all the dull vanity of study, which overshoots itself; he compares this thirst for fame with the vain desires for honour exhibited by the scholar and the word-monger.

The king has chosen Armado to amuse them by his minstrelsy during their hermit-life; and similar to the contempt with which the king regards his boasting vein is the scorn with which Biron views the learned and ascetic vanity of the king; but he has himself fallen into a still lighter vanity, for which he incurs Rosaline's censure. Endowed with a keen eye and an acute mind, gifted with captivating and touching eloquence, he has habituated himself to see every object in a ridiculous light, and to consider nothing sacred. The ardent black-eyed Rosaline, who is in no wise insensible to such mental gifts, but holds her part victorious in the war of words, considers him at first within the limits of becoming wit; she would not otherwise have loved him. But at last she agrees with the verdict of the world, which condemns him as a man replete with wounding and unsparing satire. And she sees the origin of this evil habit entirely in the vanity which delights in 'that loose grace which shallow laughing hearers give to fools.' She looks upon him as abandoned to the same empty desire for unsubstantial applause, as he does upon those who are placed at his side.

In passages which are unessential to the course of the real action, the poet has still more plainly exhibited the object which he had in view, however evidently it had been developed in this combination of characters. At the beginning of the fourth Act, the French princess, in the course of a conversation with the forester, makes this remark:

> Glory grows guilty of detested crimes;
> When for fame's sake, for praise, an outward part
> We bend to that the working of the heart.

Thus it is with these men of ascetic vows, at least in the sight of the French princess. Rightly had Biron warned them, that

> Study evermore is overshot;
> While it doth study to have what it would
> It doth forget to do the thing it should.

They had forgotten, at the very moment of their oath, that their vows in respect to intercourse with women could not be kept, as the daughter of the sick king of France had arrived on urgent business. Intercourse with her is not to be avoided; she is lodged with her suite in the Park. These French ladies and their attendant Boyet are now placed in contrast with the romantic band of men; they appear happy, graceful, and practical, fully bent upon the serious object of their journey, which is no less a one than to obtain from Navarre the province of Aquitain. Moreover, in the cheerfulness of a good conscience, in jest and wit, they are superior to the lords of Navarre; Biron at first looks down jealously and maliciously upon the accomplished courtier, the 'old mocker' Boyet, and his wit, as upon a 'wit's pedler,' but he finds subsequently when his anger has cooled that he 'must needs be friends' with him. The truth of Biron's predictions is now proved by the ascetics. The French ladies delight in their folly, sure of obtaining their object the more easily, and the young lords to boot. The votaries of abstinence, Biron as much as Armado and Costard, all fall in love; and all, even Biron, the ridiculer of poetry, woo in heart-breaking sonnets; and when they mutually discover their weakness, they use all their sophistry to set aside their oath as inadmissible 'treason 'gainst the kingly state of youth.' But the French ladies do not take it so lightly. When the nobles first appear in their Russian habits, the ladies mislead them

in a spirit of piquant raillery, and each, deceived by their disguise, wooes contrary to his intention; thus they now become perjured through ignorance, as before in perfect consciousness. The ladies cut them with their mocking tongues as keenly as with 'the razor's edge;' and when the king declares the breach of his vow, and invites them to his court, the princess shames him by refusing to be 'a breaking-cause of heavenly oaths.' Shakespeare nevertheless is careful to guard against the French ladies being deemed over-severe moralists, whose verdict would perhaps too widely differ from that of the poet himself, and he therefore gives us an insight into their tone of conversation among themselves and with Boyet—a conversation which strikes even the peasant Costard by its sweet vulgarity and smooth obscenity. Possibly a thrust at French manners, an opportunity that no English poet at that time would readily miss, was intended by the scene, but it is also certain that the design of the poet was at the same time to avoid the meaning of his play being as little as possible left in the dark.

But if all that we have adduced fails to evidence clearly the poet's intention in Love's Labour's Lost, he has given the catastrophe, which concludes the merry comedy, a striking turn, in order to make it most glaringly apparent. The nobles order a play to be represented before the ladies by their musicians and attendants, and by this means they revenge themselves on the director Holofernes for their own spoilt masquerade, by spoiling his pageant also, which was one of those simple popular plays such as Shakespeare ridicules in the Midsummer-Night's Dream, but which he ridicules in a kindly spirit, honouring the good will—one of those innocent sports which best please because 'they least know how.' In the midst of extravagant jest and folly, however, a discord rings through the piece: the king of France is dead, and sorrow and parting interrupt the mirth. The embarrassed king attempts an unintelligible wooing, the embarrassed Biron endeavours to explain it, and becomes confused and perplexed himself; but the princess banishes the perjured guilt-burdened king for a year to a hermitage, if he wishes to have his request granted; Rosaline sends the mocker Biron to a hospital, where for a twelvemonth he is to jest with the sick, and if possible to be cured of his fault. Love's Labour is lost; 'Jack hath not Jill,' contrary to the custom of comedy; it is a comedy that ends in tears. Certainly this conclusion is in opposition to all æsthetic

antecedence, but the catastrophe is genuinely Shakespearian; for moral rectitude was ever the poet's aim rather than a strict adherence to the rules of art.

We have made it perhaps almost too prominent that Shakespeare in this play attacks a vain desire of fame in all its forms; but we cannot in Germany be too distinct, if we would repudiate certain perversities of criticism, which have repeatedly placed Shakespeare in an entirely false light. Romanticists felt the conclusion of the piece too grave, too severe for their lax morality; unequal to the poet's austerity, they perceived irony everywhere, even where he wrote in the most sober earnestness. Biron—thus Tieck interprets the conclusion of the piece in reference to which men of simple understanding have nothing to explain—Biron, whilst he promises to 'jest a twelvemonth in an hospital,' casts a side-glance upon his companions: 'These for a year would dispute with learning and wit, write verses on their love, carry on their jests, and even Armado is not wanting to them, even Costard is not to be withdrawn from them and the new acquaintance with Holofernes will not even be given up. *This company is the Hospital!*' But we feel, indeed, that a kind of moral stupidity is requisite to believe that after this agitating conclusion, sophistry, playfulness, and jesting can begin afresh, and comedy resume its place.

This strange notion accords with the predilection which our Romanticists feel for the humorous characters of the poet. The Birons, the Benedicks, the Mercutios, were above all other characters their declared favourities. And indeed they are all excellently formed characters, both as the poet and nature designed them: straightforward and free from all sentimentality; adversaries to love trifling, and despisers of it; sound realists; clever fellows with a witty tongue and a ready sword behind, at once wits and bullies. That Shakespeare personally partook of this kind of nature may be proved; that this nature was only one side of him, of necessity confirmed by the whole fashion of his versatile mind. It is thus a natural consequence that he did not conceive nor idealize these characters with the exclusive preference of our Romanticists, and this may be proved in the most indisputable manner to the unbiassed mind. Whoever attentively reads and compares the comic scenes, 'the civil war of wits,' between Boyet and his ladies, between Biron and Rosaline, between Mercutio and Romeo, Benedick and Beatrice, and others—scenes which in Love's Labour's Lost for the first time

occur in more decided form and in far greater abundance than elsewhere—will readily see that they rest upon a common human basis, and at the same time upon a conventional one as to time and place. They hinge especially upon the play and perversion of words; and this is the foundation for wit common in every age. Even in the present day we have but to analyze the wit amongst jovial men to find that it always proceeds from punning and quibbling. The conventional peculiarity, therefore, in Shakespeare, is the definite form in which this word-wit appears. This form was cultivated among the English people according to an established custom, which invested jocose conversation with the character of a regular battle. A word or a sentence is snatched from the mouth of an adversary whom it is wished to provoke, and turned and perverted into a weapon against him; he parries the thrust and strikes back, espying a similar weakness in his enemy's ward; the longer the battle is sustained, the better; he who can do no more is vanquished. In this play of Shakespeare's, Armado names this war of words an *argument;* it is described as like a game at tennis, where the words are hurled, caught, and thrown back again, and where the loser is he who allows the word, like the ball, to drop; this war of wit is compared to a battle; that between Boyet and Biron, for example, to a seafight. The manner in which wit and satire here thus wage war is by no means Shakespeare's property; it is universally found on the English stage, and is transferred to it directly from life. What we know of Shakespeare's social life reveals to us this same kind of jesting in his personal intercourse. Tradition speaks of Shakespeare as 'a handsome, well-shaped man, very good company, and of a very ready and pleasant and smooth wit.' At the Mermaid in Friday Street he associated with Beaumont, Fletcher, Selden, Ben Jonson, and other intellectual contemporaries; and there, according to Beaumont, in his address to Ben Jonson, were

> heard words that have been
> So nimble, and so full of subtle flame,
> As if that everyone from whom they came
> Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest.

Especially famous were the meetings between Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. According to Fuller, they were accustomed to meet 'like a Spanish great galleon, and an English man-of-war: Master Jonson, like the former, was built far higher in learning;

solid but slow in his performances; Shakespeare, like the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention.' Thus these 'wit-combats' in Shakespeare's life are compared to the same image as those between Boyet and Biron in Love's Labour's Lost. If in addition to these intimations we look for more distinct proof of the diffusion among the people of this kind of 'wit-combat,' we must recall to mind Tarlton's jests. We find the merry man engaging in a conflict of wit sometimes with a roguish boy, sometimes with a housekeeper, sometimes with a constable; and just as in a comedy, the task, the pride, and the victory is to drive the adversary to a nonplus; that is, to exhaust his wit and bring him to silence. From all this we see that these humorous combats and combatants were a custom of the age, which Shakespeare could not avoid, but which he had as little cause to spare as any other custom which had grown into an abuse. We can easily understand how a practice so widely spread among men of versatile mind and manners would become a fashion, and in such case would have been as wearisome as any other habit to Shakespeare's active mind. We can further understand how, with these professional wits, the habit could be easily carried so far as to make the cheerful humour degenerate into scorn, to pervert the 'pleasant smooth wit' into motiveless and insipid jeering, to lead to quarrels, and to turn the wit into a bully. Such natures has Shakespeare depicted in Biron and Mercutio, and this with that perfect impartiality with which he does justice to every quality. An equal sense of jest and earnest, according to the demands of life and opportunity, was the ideal of human intercourse to which Shakespeare would have rendered homage. For, however penetrated he was with this idea that moderate cheerful jest confirmed and promoted the truth and freedom of the mind, he knew also that laughers by profession never pierce through the surface of things—where, as Bacon says, is the seat of jest. Throughout, therefore, he has given his healthiest humourists the healthiest part of the seriousness of life as their dowry. Thus, in Much Ado about Nothing, he has made his Benedick a much more perfect character than Biron and Mercutio. In the intercourse of Beatrice with Benedick there is the same playful tone of raillery as in that between Biron and Rosaline; a similarly tragic discord interrupts the mirth; the

poet's aim is the same in this far more delicately constructed play; the stern reality of life bursts suddenly upon the laughing bantering couple, and they win each other from the fact that they know how to meet seriously these serious demands, which Biron only learns after Rosaline's censure. With a predilection however, of an almost entirely pathological character, Shakespeare delineated his Prince Henry as a being of two natures, a hero like none other and a laugher like none other, who amid work and pastime, amid noble exertion and playful recreation, ever with the happiest equality stood ready for the demands of the moment. Elsewhere, moreover, for the intelligent reader, the poet has expressed as distinctly as possible his own serious views upon these humorous habits of the time. In All's Well that Ends Well the king depicts the old Count of Roussillon as an ideal of chivalry and education. He possessed, said the panegyrist,

> The wit, which I can well observe
> To-day in our young lords; but they may jest,
> Till their own scorn returns to them unnoted,
> Ere they can hide their levity in honour.
> So like a courtier, contempt nor bitterness
> Were in his pride or sharpness; if they were,
> His equal had awaked them; and his honour,
> Clock to itself, knew the true minute, when
> Exception bid him speak, and, at this time,
> His tongue obeyed his hand: . . . . .
> Thus his good melancholy oft began,
> On the catastrophe and heel of pastime,
> When it was out.

We easily perceive that this is a picture drawn with true delight of a man of honour, who possessed, in enviable proportion, the two qualities of jest and earnest, but whose characteristics were directly opposed to those of the fashionable youths who had learned nothing but ridicule, and 'whose short-lived wits,' as our play says, 'do wither as they grow.'

In Meres' often mentioned list of the plays of Shakespeare, which were written previous to the year 1598, we know there was a comedy entitled 'Love's Labour's Won.' Hunter has long ago made the vain attempt to recognise this play in the Tempest; recently an anonymous writer (the author of the pamphlet, 'Collier, Coleridge, and Shakespeare,' 1860, p. 130)

has advanced the more plausible conjecture of Much Ado about Nothing, which we also feel inclined to refuse; for why should the poet have exchanged so significant a title for one so insignificant. We shall, therefore, do well to rest upon a former supposition of Farmer and others, that All's Well that Ends Well is the play which in an earlier and older treatment bore that title. In a passage in the Epilogue ('all is well ended, if this suit is won') both titles are, as it were, blended. The supposition is all the more probable, since all agree that the piece has evidently been remodelled, and that not only as concerns the title. Coleridge, in his lectures on Shakespeare, pointed out two distinct styles in the piece; the rhymed passages, the alternate rhymes, and the sonnet-letter of Helena, point to the form which the piece probably more uniformly bore, when with its first title it was placed by the side of Love's Labour's Lost, to the style of which those passages nearly correspond. By far the greater part of the play, however, must have undergone a complete remodelling; for the prose-scenes, the soliloquies, which in profound thought and force often call to mind Hamlet and Timon, and challenge all the interpreter's art of arrangement, punctuation, and transposition; and the comic passages, which in substance and form recall the scenes of Falstaff, all evidently belong to the later period of the poet's writing, probably to the years 1605 or 1606. Nevertheless we discuss the piece in this place on account of the time of its probable origin, and on account also of the contrast which it affords to Love's Labour's Lost, not only in form but in spirit.

In passing from the last discussed play to All's Well that Ends Well, we feel at once an outward difference and we divine an inward one; we pass from the florid and exaggerated Italian style of Shakespeare's earlier period to the popular English tone which distinguishes his later writings, and this transition of style exactly suits the subject of this counterpart as well as its psychological treatment. In Love's Labour's Lost, Biron is one of those humorous characters, devoid of all sentimentality, little suited to the peculiar service of love among the circle of the courtiers of Navarre; a man with whom love is rather a kind of subtile speculation, the offspring of idleness, carried on like a play of the fancy, with sonnets and poems which are rather the work of the head than the emotions of the heart, with concealed avowals which betrayed more wit than feeling; a man whose love-service has method but little natural truth, which has many

words but little action or tested feeling. When this actor-like wooing suffers shipwreck, Biron's truer nature returns, and he rejects that Romanic service of love and poetry with all the candour of a Saxon; he renounces

> The taffata phrases, silken terms precise,
> Three-piled hyperboles, spruce affectation,
> Figures pedantical;

and he protests that henceforth his

> Wooing mind shall be expressed
> In russet yeas, and honest kersey noes.

In this manner Shakespeare has made his Prince Henry woo, his model of unaffected nature. But in All's Well that Ends Well he has delineated in Bertram a youth who like Biron is a despiser of love, but who acts the part to such an extreme that he does not even join in the coarsest wooing, but on the contrary must himself be wooed. The part of the wooer in the love-affairs of this play belongs strangely enough to the woman. But as if this play was intended to form a contrast as great and as glaring as possible to Love's Labour's Lost, all sentimentality, affectation, and unnaturalness is avoided even in her wooing. She woos with tears, her love speaks by deeds of merit, the poetry of her relation to Bertram rests in the capability for action and sacrifice of a character free from all mental sickliness. In Love's Labour's Lost, the lords of Navarre had a political ground for not abjuring the society of women; in mere caprice they indulged the utterly *groundless* whim of suppressing nature unnaturally. In contrast to this affected renunciation of these praise-seeking nobles, we have here a modest womanly being who loves her foster-brother, far removed as he is from her in rank, who has *all possible reasons* within and without her for repressing and renouncing her passion, but in whom a full healthy nature and divine power in a feeble vessel pierce through all the barriers which appear so insurmountable, instead of creating natural obstacles. In harmony with this, throughout this play, both in its story and in its leading characters, all is simple nature, hearty endeavour, and action without many words, while in the other all is affectation, poetic play, and shallow intercourse without much action. And as in the one, the idea of the piece is again and again decidedly expressed and repeated by the loquacious characters; in the other, on the

contrary, it is silently placed in the characters themselves and in the facts of the play.

In the story of the play only the comic parts, such as the characters of Parolles, Lafeu, the clown, and the countess, are the property and invention of the poet; the main pith and subject of the play is borrowed from Boccaccio's novel of 'Giglietta di Nerbona,' which Shakespeare may have read in Painter's 'Palace of Pleasure.' The play is all the more remarkable, because we learn from it the relation of Shakespeare and his drama to his narrative models of Romanic origin, and perceive what a different power predominates in the Saxon poet, and what increased care dramatic poetry claims, falling as it does under the severe criticism of the eye, compared to the narrative tales which are subjected to the more sparing judgment of the credulous ear.

The famous Italian novelist relates how the foster-daughter of the Count of Roussillon, the daughter of his physician, fell in love with his son Bertram; how the latter travelled to Paris, how the girl devises a plan to follow him; how the sickness of the king affords her a pretext for this; how she cures him, and asks as a reward count Bertram for a husband, and receives him against his will; how he disdains to acknowledge her as a wife, except on two impossible conditions which he places before her. In Boccaccio's novel there is no mention of a motive for all these strange actions. Giglietta is not only beautiful but rich, and as far as this goes there is therefore less ground for scorning her; contempt would rather be excited by her undue forwardness. She reflects how she may hasten after the departed lover; she has prepared a plan for obtaining him through the recovery of the king; when he places before her the conditions, she broods forthwith over the scheme of making possible the impossible. To this we listen in the narrative with dull ear, but we never could see it represented. A husband-seeking woman, who, devoid of all delicacy, made and accomplished such schemes, would only become subsequently still more despised by the man who had despised her from the first; upon the stage no one could take an interest in it; it would be felt as disgusting.

But Shakespeare has not made his work so easy. The manner in which he has designed the relation of the two characters in question, committing the most romantic undertakings to a girl, who is at last, however, to appear in her womanliness

and morality well worthy of love, the boldness with which he meets the greatest improbabilities, accumulating difficulties in full consciousness of success, all this appears to us of extreme importance in this play. The poet receives the story just as it was given him. He takes it with all its romantic extravagance, to which he is as keenly alive as any one among ourselves. He has often subsequently done just the same with stories still more strange. There is a kind of poetic orthodoxy about him, by which he gets the very pith of the transmitted piece, holds it inviolable, and leaves it intact. But with just as much disregard and freedom he remodels the surrounding circumstances and characters according to his necessities; he gives motives to them and to their actions, so that in truth and reality they *might have done* something similar, something analogous to that which the legend assigned to them, and this in a manner credible and possible to all fellow mortals. To the cold temperament the story may still appear merely as an artistic embodiment, as an arbitrary fiction, for which in prosaic interpretation any other more natural relation may be devised. To him, on the contrary, whose easily excited imagination rises above the commonplaces of reality, these dry reflections will not be needed. He will see that the wonderful quality of this genius is that he throws such a spell of nature over the most unwonted circumstances, that he makes us forget in the midst of the most romantic matter that we are in the region of dreams and poetry.

The poet does not depict the maiden as rich, nor as overflowing with schemes and sensibility; but as poor, modest, humble, gentle, entirely resting upon her womanly nature. Seized with love for her foster-brother, entirely filled with this one longing, she is nevertheless devoted even to resignation, 'like the hind that would be mated by the lion,' and must die for love. In her soliloquies she does not even express a desire; 'it hurts not him, that he is loved of her,' this is her plea; Indian-like, she adores the sun, 'that looks upon his worshipper, but knows of him no more.' This self-denial is all the more conspicuous when she is agitated by the violence of a genuinely strong passion, which her active imagination betrays to the listener in audible soliloquy. 'Twas pretty, though a plague,' she says, 'to see him every hour.' But with this self-mastering, self-renouncing, modest nature, she is prudent, clever, and apt—qualities which in reality are so often united

in superior women. She knows, so it is said of her, how to put 'sharp stings in her mildest words.' She possesses the twofold gift, not incompatible with the genuine womanliness of her character, of being at once modest and courageous, ready to endure, and prompt for action. She exhibits the quality of increasing in active decision when circumstances favour it, without forfeiting her woman's nature, even when taking steps that appear masculine. She contrives not for herself (it is just this which in Boccaccio's tales appears so masculine and indelicate), but she starts not back discouraged at the execution of a bold thought when suggested to her; she knows not how to create plans and projects for herself, but when fate has presented them to her she is capable of grasping them with ability. And this not from masculine boldness, but from pious trust and a persevering, steadfast nature, which from her youth up, on account of her poor position, rendered her self-dependent. She has read in the Bible that 'He that of greatest works is finisher, oft does them by the weakest minister,' and upon this she has established the principle that we must meet the proffered good and must use the powers we have received.

Let us attentively follow this character through the entanglements of the knot which her own love has made, careful not to substitute anything which is alien to the poet and his Helena, but equally careful not to lose even the slighest touch which he has made in her delineation. Even before she advances to action, we perceive the depth of her feeling and the innocent dissimulation, which circumstances compel her to adopt. The lover bids adieu to his home, the tears are in her eyes, she dare not show them. They burst forth when the countess praises her, when they are speaking of her deceased father. The mother imputes them to a remembrance of her father; Helena does not contradict her, but gives an equivocal reply; she permits herself this small sophistry, not without excusing it to herself: her tears flow from so noble a source, that, even thus shed, they grace the remembrance of her father. Bertram departs; she is fully resigned; she has no anticipation of being able to obtain him; she lives alone on the recollection of intercourse with him. Only when the contemptible Parolles, his follower, whose way it is to be intolerably saucy even with honourable personages, annoys her with unseemly wit, when thus she is reminded of the bad society in which Bertram is

now entering the world, when she pictures the temptations to which he will be exposed in Paris, is jealousy excited in her; and a pardonable weakness, not a masculine power, is the first source of the plan to follow him, in order to guard him from falling into strange hands, whilst her love at home is decaying and growing old. And vaguely with these ideas does the thought intrude itself as to whether this struggling desire may not also give her the power of attaining her object. She thinks to be able to deserve him, yet never knows how 'that desert should be.' Her father's prescription for the king's malady occurs to her only as a ground for the journey; but she has no idea of employing the cure of the king for the acquisition of the count. This thought is suggested by the countess, Bertram's own mother, who, discovering her love from an over-heard soliloquy, favours it, and looking back to her own youth, recognises in herself a similar nature; and who, now grown into a practical matron, points out and contrives the way which leads straight to the object. Helena goes forthwith to Paris to cure the king; every sacrifice, even life, staked on this hazardous cure, is nothing to her. If we keep in view all that at this time, before and subsequently, she stakes upon the man of her heart, her womanliness is exhibited in stronger light by what follows. Her manner of choice ever manifests the same amiability:

> I dare not say, I take you; but I give
> Me, and my service, ever whilst I live,
> Into your guiding power.

Sought after by all others, even by 'hearts that scorned to serve, humbly called mistress,' she is disdained by Bertram, and she retires at once with her wonted resignation. But the king, in virtue of his power as liege lord and guardian of Bertram, irritated at his refusal, and bent upon making him feel his distance from him as deeply as he had caused Helena to feel his own from her, compels him to the marriage, upon which she receives from Bertram the conditions on which he will acknowledge her as his wife. She is very different to the Giglietta of Boccaccio, who at once broods over a plan for fulfilling these conditions. She has lost him, and resignedly she returns home. He has written to her, that until he has no wife he has nothing to do in France. She now hears that he has repaired to the Florentine war; she can only believe he

has done it on her account; but she will not be guilty of his plunging himself into danger and for her sake avoiding home and mother. She wishes not to destroy his happiness; like a 'poor thief' she steals away from the castle of her love to make a pilgrimage to Saint Jaques; then she causes them to write home that she has died there. Too great heroism for such a womanly creature, as we have considered Helena to be! The poet, therefore, tempers it with the same affectionate weakness which prompted her first journey to Paris. She takes the way through Florence, that she may once more see him, and there fortune rewards her toil and fidelity by the accomplishment of the strangest scheme. This plan, daring but not unlawful for Bertram's lawful wife, she *devises* not for herself, but she *seizes* it with the same quick determination, as she has before done that of the countess. There is here also nothing amazon-like; the most womanly impulse is at work, whether it be jealousy or the design of guarding her husband, like his protecting angel, from a sinful step. The picture is drawn of an innocent and strong love perpetually meeting with fresh hindrances, and only excited by these to fresh and greater efforts.

Thus far this strange plot is made not only outwardly possible, but also—and this is the main point—morally so, for a noble female character, in whom we may take warm interest. There remains a new difficulty. How is it conceivable that her beloved one, her husband, can be won, not alone to a compelled union, but to actual love, after he had once disdained her?

Bertram's character is placed in perfect contrast to Helena's. Throughout she appears humble, meek, modest, but perfectly mature, wise, and prudent, endowed with high aspirations and instinctively impelled to follow them. He, on the other hand, is haughty, rash, and unbridled, assuming although ill-advised, influenced by the most wretched society, and entirely devoid of judgment and reflection. The ground upon which he disdains the much-desired Helena is, first of all, that the emotion of female love is as yet altogether foreign to him. His flattering attendant Parolles, who can be of no use to the married Bertram, prejudices him systematically against these emotions; he had also once thus regarded a daughter of Lafeu's through the 'scornful perspective' of contempt. Before the king he alleges his ancestry and the difference of rank as the

ground of his disdain. Here lies the moral centre of the piece, and the main difference between the two characters. As the heroes in 'Love's Labour's Lost' suffer from the conceit of seeming virtue, so does this one from the vanity of seeming merit. This difference of blood and rank has no importance for Helena; her strong nature is never master over custom, but is everywhere struggling against mere custom and conventionality. Her desire is only to know how she could possibly deserve Bertram; that she *can* deserve him, she doubts not. Her noble mind suggests that,

> The mightiest space in fortune, nature brings
> To join like likes, and kiss like native things.

Full of this self-reliance, she gives free course to her love, and fears not the difficulties of the path. In this the countess, Bertram's mother, meets her. She has perfect congeniality of soul with Helena; she looks back upon similar experiences in her own youth, when she too 'did wish chastely and love dearly,' and as Helena says, 'Dian was both herself and love.' She regards this strong passion, which seems to her to bear 'the show and seal of nature's truth,' with the interest of personal sympathy, and she gives her maternal favour to the poor foster-child against the haughty son whose name she washes out of her blood. But we first feel the full significance of this affection when we have seen the thoroughly aristocratic bearing of the lady in that scene (Act III. sc. 2) in which she receives the intelligence that her son has rejected Helena. Amid all the disquietude which the wretched intelligence causes her, amid the grief of the parent, the sympathy of the foster-mother and of the woman, she yet in the proud restraining of her emotion preserves the dignity of the housewife and hostess; she has 'felt so many quirks of joy, and grief, that the first face of neither, on the start, can woman her unto't.' And as the heroine of the play in consequence of her position, and the countess in consequence of her experience and principles, so the valiant old lord Lafeu is also raised above the prejudice of distinction of rank, and places virtue and merit above nobility and blood; once indeed he had himself raised a claim for Bertram in behalf of his daughter. Nay, even the highest representative of all dignity of rank, the king himself, takes the same exalted view, and this may be traced with him to the

threatening nearness of the grave, upon the brink of which he had stood. 'Strange is it,' he says,

> that our bloods,
> Of colour, weight, and heat, pour'd all together,
> Would quite confound distinction, yet stand off
> In differences so mighty:
> From lowest place when virtuous things proceed,
> The place is dignified by the doer's deed:
> Where great additions swell, and virtue none,
> It is a dropsied honour: good alone
> Is good, without a name; vileness is so.
> . . . . Honours best thrive,
> When rather from our acts we them derive,
> Than our foregoers.

Thus, then, all the characters of the piece are, on this point, opposed to Bertram; even the comic character, the clown Lavatch, is presented in caricature under the same aspect, since he is at first encumbered with a foolish passion which must end in beggary. Ulrici's statement, therefore, that some characters had no reference to the main idea of the piece, appears unfounded. For this ruling principle may even be traced in the character of Diana, in whom the sensitive pride of poverty and womanliness is set at naught, compared with the one thing which she possesses, namely, her stainless honour, and for a virtuous object she engages in a project that must be painful to her.

The idea that merit goes before rank has, as we shall presently see, expressly occupied Shakespeare's mind in the period before us. It is the soul of this play, and of the relation between Bertram and Helena. If, then, haughtiness of spirit and youthful pride in liberty, added to arrogance of rank, were the grounds for Helena's rejection by Bertram, the question arises as to how the poet removed these inner hindrances to the union, after circumstances had set aside outward impediments, and had joined the pair in the external form of marriage. The masterly manner in which this is done rivals that with which he has solved the other half of this moral knot.

The nobility of a fine nature is innate in Bertram; his degeneracy into pride is only youthful error. His mother calls him 'an unseasoned courtier,' 'a well-derived nature,' corrupted by seducement. The good qualities of his nature even facilitate this temptation. His outward appearance, a youth with curled

hair, arched brows, and hawking eye, who, as the clown depicts him, 'will look upon his boot, and sing; mend the ruff, and sing; pick his teeth, and sing,' proclaims a smart nature, which at the same time is much occupied with itself and has little feeling left for others. No inner mental life has yet penetrated his years of churlishness. He is far from the wit of a Biron, far from the culture of that King of Navarre, far from the sensibility of a Dumain; he is entirely a man of Biron's honest kersey yeas and noes, but without Biron's refinement and wit; laconic, as Shakespeare never again exhibited any principal character; even in his letters he is just as characteristically short and compact. This rough, abrupt, uncourtly vein, bursts forth into ebullitions of defiance when he is excited. Full of youthful zeal, his whole soul is given to action and fame; at the court of the king he is angry because he is detained from the Florentine war; twice he cannot ask, he will steal away. Now follows Helena's choice, and crosses the one thought that filled his soul. He had in his youthful moods never yet dreamt of love; at this moment he feels love for no one in the world; that he is *commanded* to take this wife, above all provokes his resentment. In this passion, we must observe, and not in cold sophistry, he not only prescribes to Helena those conditions which stipulate, as it were, for his freest choice after the compulsory marriage just concluded, but he even purposes to defy the king by letter. If anything is wanting to retain in him this hardened feeling of resentment, there is the base flatterer Parolles who holds him ensnared, who wishes to keep him free and open to his own parasitical arts, who hates Helena and is active in placing her in a hateful aspect. The curse of the king, who threatens to 'throw' his refractory subject 'into the careless lapse of youth and ignorance,' is fulfilled; the connection of the unwary Bertram with this same Parolles, this Armado in arms, exhibits his entire destitution of counsel and advice. As a braggart, a liar, a fop, a wretched man, 'who hath outvillained villany so far, that the rarity redeems him,' as a seducer of youth, as a meagre Falstaff who entangles Bertram in Florence into his immoral intercourse with Diana, this braggart is known to all except to Bertram; Lafeu, who warns Bertram plainly and decidedly of him, though in vain, calls him 'a window of lattice' easily to be seen through; the clown calls him 'a very little of nothing;' but to Bertram he was everything; Helena appears to him too low for a wife, but this

man seems equal for a friend; the straightforward open youth, 'could endure anything before but a cat,' and yet under the yoke of this parasite he lies ensnared, and his unsuspicious soul divines not what he is. At Florence he appears most glaringly in his cloven nature, good and bad, brave and glorious, but at the same time dissolute and corrupt, sunk into the habits of a debauchee. At the turning-point of the play we see him in a whirlpool of activity, in utter confusion both of mind and manner. In the act of leaving Florence, he despatches 'sixteen businesses, by an abstract of success;' in his familiar fashion, he takes leave of the duke in the street; he prepares for the journey; he writes to his mother; he has agreed upon a meeting with Diana; he has given to her, a frivolous woman (as he must deem her), the ring, the same ring, to obtain which he had imposed upon Helena an impossible task; the family-ring upon which, as it were, the honour of his house rested. Overwhelmed with passion, he has in so doing lost the right to urge his family and rank further against Helena. He now receives the tidings of Helena's death. When he reads the letter, he is 'changed almost into another man;' he begins to love her when he learns her death; how should that heart, which had broken for his sake, leave his unmoved? He buries her not only in his thoughts, but deplores her. And to make his sudden change the more emphatic, he had sworn to Diana to marry her when his wife was dead; it must torment him to think how much more free his conscience would be if the rejection of Helena had never brought him into this position. Nevertheless he does not relinquish the meeting with Diana; and more than this, not only from sorrow does he plunge into the intoxication of his senses, but from this he passes to the ludicrous scene which is to unmask to him his friend Parolles. In a state of inward confusion, he thus seeks to drown the voice of conscience; for the discovery concerning Parolles must have opened to him before everything his own helpless immaturity, and must have made him look repentantly within. This humiliation of soul is to follow his outward abasement stroke by stroke; he is to learn thoroughly to mortify his arrogance and to suspect his pride. The death of Helena, the peace at Florence, and the duke's letter to the king, explain his return to court. There he is convicted of having given his ring to a worthless woman, his guilt is exposed, and he is scorned by Lafeu, whose daughter he should have married; he

incurs the disregard of all, and is even suspected of having murdered Helena. His riddles, his ring, and the torments which he had created by it, recoil avengingly upon himself. Thus humbled and depressed, he is freed not only from a burdensome marriage, but what is still more, from a fearful burden of conscience; must he not regard the woman who brought him this sacrifice as the beneficent guardian spirit who should best counsel him through life? He stands before her, the proud man of rank whose noble birth has gained him no virtue, who had wantonly hazarded at once nobility and virtue; he stands before *her* who was ennobled by virtue, and had saved him the symbol of *his* nobility. Like those aspiring innovators of whom Bacon says, that in comparison to their activity 'nobles appear like statues,' she, wooing by actions, has conquered the man of her love; yet even after conditions executed and rights won, she is steadfast in her womanly nature, in her old humble ways and in her calm resignation. This wholly softens in him all that was yet unmelted in his inflexible nature. When still in fear and suspense she utters the painful words, 'Tis but the name and not the thing'—not his wife—he, in his laconic way, compresses all repentance, all contrition, all gratitude and love into the words: 'Both, both; O pardon!' and it needs but an actor who knows how to prepare for these words, how to utter them and to accompany them with suitable action, to leave the spectator no room for anxiety as to the future of the pair.

In few plays do we feel, so much as in All's Well that Ends Well, what excessive scope the poet leaves open to the actor's art. Few readers, and still fewer female readers, will believe in Helena's womanly nature, even after they have read our explanations and have found them indisputable. The subject has at once repelled them; and so far would we gladly make allowance for this feeling, that we grant that Shakespeare might better have bestowed his psychological art upon more agreeable matter, and that he has often done so. But even he who, by the aid of our remarks, may have overcome his repugnance to the subject, will seldom find himself able by reflection to imagine it possible that such bold and masculine steps could be taken in a thoroughly feminine manner. Only by seeing this work of art and by trusting the eye, can we be sensible of its full and harmonious effect. But that even the eye may be convinced, a great actress is required. Bertram also demands a good actor, if the spectator is to perceive that this is a man

capable of rewarding efforts so great on the part of a woman, a man whose painful wooing promises a grateful possession. That this unsentimental youth has a heart, this corrupted libertine a good heart, that this scorner can ever love the scorned, this is indeed *read* in his scanty words, but few readers of the present day are free enough from sentimentality to believe such things on the credit of a few words. The case is entirely different when, in the *acted* Bertram, they *see* the noble nature, the ruin of his character at Florence, and the contrition which his sins and his simplicity call forth; when, from the whole bearing of the brusque man, they perceive what the one word 'pardon' signified in his mouth, when they see his breast heave at the last appearance of Helena bringing ease to his conscience. Credence is then given to his last words; for the great change in his nature—of which now only a forlorn word or two is read and overlooked—would then have been witnessed. Seldom has a task so independent as the character of Bertram been left to the art of the actor; but still more seldom is the actor to be found, who knows how to execute it. To Richard Burbage this part must have been a dainty feast. About the time when it received its present form (1605–8), Shakespeare had prepared for him also Pericles and Petruchio, as equally attractive tasks. Thus arrived at the height of their respective arts, both the actor and the poet seem to have delighted in mutually craving and affording these faint sketches of character, as if for the sake of practising their common work, of drawing outlines and finishing them, or of supplying riddles and solving them.

MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM.

If All's Well that Ends Well be read immediately between Love's Labour's Lost and the Midsummer-Night's Dream, we feel that in the former the matured hand of the poet was at work, while the two other pieces stand in closer connection. The performance of the comic parts by the clowns affords a resemblance between the two pieces, but this resemblance appears still more plainly in the mode of diction. Apart from the fairy songs, in which Shakespeare, in a masterly manner, preserves the popular tone of the style which existed before him, the play bears prominently the stamp of the Italian school. The language—picturesque, descriptive, and florid with conceits—the too apparent alliterations, the doggrel passages which extend over the passionate and impressive scenes, and the old mythology so suited to the subject; all this places the piece in a close, or at least not remote relation, to Love's Labour's Lost. As in this play, the story and the original combination of the characters of ancient, religious, and historical legends with those of the popular Saxon myths, are the property and invention of the poet. As in Love's Labour's Lost, utterly unlike the characterisation which we have just seen in All's Well that Ends Well, the acting characters are distinguished only by a very general outline; the strongest distinction is that between the little pert Hermia, shrewish and irritable even at school, and the slender yielding Helena, distrustful and reproachful of herself; the distinction is less apparent between the upright open Lysander and the somewhat malicious and inconstant Demetrius. The period of the origin of the play—which like Henry VIII. and the Tempest may have been written in honour of the nuptials of some noble couple—is placed at about 1594 or 1596. The marriage of Theseus is the turning-point of the action of the piece, which comprises the clowns, fairies, and the common race of men. The piece is a masque, one of those dramas for

special occasions appointed for private representation, which Ben Jonson especially brought to perfection. In England this species of drama has as little a law of its own as the historical drama; compared to the ordinary drama it exhibits, according to Halpin, an insensible transition, undistinguishable by definition. As in the historical drama, its distinction from the free drama almost entirely arises from the nature and the mass of the matter; so in the masque, it proceeds from the occasion of its origin, from its necessary reference to it, and from the allegorical elements which are introduced. These latter, it must be admitted, have given a peculiar stamp to the Midsummer-Night's Dream among the rest of Shakespeare's works.

Upon the most superficial reading we perceive that the actions in the Midsummer-Night's Dream, still more than the characters themselves, are treated quite differently to those in other plays of Shakespeare. The presence of an underlying motive—the great art and true magic wand of the poet—has here been completely disregarded. Instead of reasonable inducements, instead of natural impulses arising from character and circumstance, caprice is master here. We meet with a double pair, who are entangled in strange mistakes, the motives to which we, however, seek for in vain in the nature of the actors themselves. Demetrius, like Proteus in the Two Gentlemen of Verona, has left a bride, and, like Proteus, wooes the bride of his friend Lysander. This Lysander has fled with Hermia to seek a spot where the law of Athens cannot pursue them. Secretly, we are told, they both steal away into the wood; Demetrius in fury follows them, and, impelled by love, Helena fastens herself like a burr upon the heels of the latter. Alike devoid of conscience, Hermia errs at first through want of due obedience to her father, and Demetrius through faithlessness to his betrothed Helena, Helena through treachery to her friend Hermia, and Lysander through mockery of his father-in-law. The strife in the first act, in which we cannot trace any distinct moral motives, is in the third act changed into a perfect confusion owing to influences of an entirely external character. In the fairy world a similar disorder exists between Oberon and Titania. The play of Pyramus and Thisbe, enacted by the honest citizens, forms a comic-tragic counterpart to the tragic-comic point of the plot, depicting two lovers, who behind their

parents' backs 'think no scorn to woo by moonlight,' and through a mere accident come to a tragic end.

The human beings in the main plot of the piece are apparently impelled by mere amorous caprice; Demetrius is betrothed, then Helena pleases him no longer, he trifles with Hermia, and at the close he remembers this breach of faith only as the trifling of youth. External powers and not inward impulses and feelings appear as the cause of these amorous caprices. In the first place, the brain is heated by the warm season, the first night in May, the ghost-hour of the mystic powers; for even elsewhere Shakespeare occasionally calls a piece of folly the madness of a midsummer-day, or a dog-day's fever; and in the 98th sonnet he speaks of April as the time which puts 'the spirit of youth in everything,' making even the 'heavy Saturn laugh and leap with him.' Then Cupid, who appears in the background of the piece as a real character, misleading the judgment and blinding the eyes, takes delight in causing a frivolous breach of faith. And last of all we see the lovers completely in the hand of the fairies, who ensnare their senses and bring them into that tumult of confusion, the unravelling of which, like the entanglement itself, is to come from without. These delusions of blind passion, this jugglery of the senses during the sleep of reason, these changes of mind and errors of 'seething brains,' these actions without any higher centre of a mental and moral bearing, are compared, as it were, to a dream which unrolls before us with its fearful complications, and from which there is no deliverance but in awaking and in the recovery of consciousness.

The piece is called a Midsummer-Night's Dream; the Epilogue expresses satisfaction, if the spectator will regard the piece as a dream; for in a dream time and locality are obliterated; a certain twilight and dusk is spread over the whole; Oberon desires that all shall regard the matter as a dream, and so it is. Titania speaks of her adventure as a vision, Bottom of his metamorphosis as a dream; all the rest awake at last out of a sleep of weariness, and the events leave upon them the impression of a dream. The sober Theseus esteems their stories as nothing else than dreams and fantasies. Indeed these allusions in the play must have suggested to Coleridge and others the idea that the poet had intentionally aimed at letting the piece glide by as a dream. We only wonder that, with this opinion, they have not reached the inner kernel in

which this intention of the poet really lies enshrined—an intention which has not only given a name to the piece, but has called forth as by magic a free poetic creation of the greatest value. For it is indeed to be expected from our poet, that such an intention on his side were not to be sought for in the mere shell. If this intention were only shown in those poetical externals, in that fragrant charm of rhythm and verse, in that harassing suspense, and in that dusky twilight, then this were but a shallow work of superficial grace, by the sole use of which a poet like Shakespeare would never have dreamt of accomplishing anything worth the while.

We will now return to an examination of the play and its contents; and taking a higher and more commanding view, we will endeavour to reach the aim which Coleridge in truth only divined. We have already said that the play of amorous caprice proceeded from no inner impulse of the soul, but from external powers, from the influence of gods and fairies, among whom Cupid, the demon of the old mythology, only appears behind the scenes; while, on the other hand, the fairies, the spirits of later superstition, occupy the main place upon the stage. If we look at the functions which the poet has committed to both, namely to the god of love and to the fairies, we find to our surprise that they are perfectly similar. The workings of each upon the passions of men are the same. The infidelity of Theseus towards his many forsaken ones—Ariadne, Æglé, Antiopa, and Perigenia—which according to the ancient myth, we should ascribe to Cupid and to the intoxication of sensuous love, are imputed in the Midsummer-Night's Dream to the elfin king. Even before the fairies appear in the play, Demetrius is prompted by the infatuation of blind love, and Puck expressly says that it is not he but Cupid who originated this madness of mortals; the same may be inferred also with Titania and the boy. The fairies pursue these errors still further, in the same manner as Cupid had begun them; they increase and heal them; the juice of a flower, Dian's bud, is employed to cure the perplexities of love in both Lysander and Titania; the juice of another flower (Cupid's) had caused them. This latter flower had received its wondrous power from a wound by Cupid's shaft. The power conveyed by the shaft was perceived by the elfin king, who knew how to use it; Oberon is closely initiated into the deepest secrets of the love-god, but not so his servant Puck.

The famous passage, in which Oberon orders Puck to fetch him this herb with its ensnaring charm, is as follows:

> My gentle Puck, come hither; Thou remember'st
> Since once I sat upon a promontory,
> And heard a mermaid, on a dolphin's back,
> Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,
> That the rude sea grew civil at her song;
> And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,
> To hear the sea-maid's musick.
> That very time I saw (*but thou could'st not*)
> Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
> Cupid all arm'd: a certain aim he took
> At a fair vestal, throned by the west;
> And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
> As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts:
> But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
> Quenched in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon;
> And the imperial vot'ress passed on,
> In maiden meditation, fancy-free.
> Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell:
> It fell upon a little western flower,—
> Before milk-white; now purple with Love's wound,—
> And maidens call it love-in-idleness.
> Fetch me that flower.

This passage has recently, in the writings of the Shakespeare Society, received a spirited interpretation by Halpin ('Oberon's Vision'), which shows us that we can scarcely seek for too much in our poet; that even in the highest flight of his imagination, he never leaves the ground of reality; and that in every touch, however episodical it may appear, he ever inserts the profoundest allusions to his main subject. We know well that in the eyes of the dry critic this interpretation, though it has one firm basis of fact, has found little favour; to us this is not very conceivable: for every investigation has long proved how gladly this realistic poet maintained, in the smallest allusions as well as in the greatest designs, lively relations to the times and places round him; how in his freest tragic creations he loved to refer to historical circumstances, founding even the most foolish speeches and actions of his clowns, of his grave-diggers in Hamlet, or his patrols in Much Ado about Nothing, upon actual circumstances; and thus giving them by this very circumstance that value of indisputable truth to nature which distinguishes them so palpably beyond all other caricatures. Is it not natural that he should have been impelled to give to

just such a sweet allegory as this the firmest possible basis of fact? To us, therefore, Halpin's interpretation of this passage is all the more unquestionable, as it gives a most definite purpose to the innermost spirit of the whole play. We must therefore, before we proceed further, first consider more narrowly this episodical narrative and its bearing upon the fundamental idea of the Midsummer-Night's Dream.

It has always been agreed that by the vestal, throned by the west, from whom Cupid's shaft glided off, Queen Elizabeth was intended; and the whole passage was in consequence esteemed as a delicate flattery of the maiden queen. But we see at once by this instance, that Shakespeare—extraordinary in this respect as in every other—knew how to make his courtly flatteries, of which he was on all occasions most sparing, subservient to the æsthetic or moral aims of his poetry, by the introduction of deeper poetic or moral bearings. It was thus with this passage, which has now received a much more extended interpretation. Cupid 'all armed' is referred to the Earl of Leicester's wooing of Elizabeth and to his great preparations at Kenilworth for this purpose (1575). From descriptions of these festivities (Gascoyne's 'Princely Pleasures,' 1576, and Laneham's 'Letter,' 1575), we know, that at the spectacles and fireworks which enlivened the rejoicings, a singing mermaid was introduced, swimming on smooth water upon a dolphin's back, amid shooting stars; these characteristics agree with those which Oberon specifies to Puck. The arrow aimed at the priestess of Diana, whose bud possesses the power of quenching love, and which had such force over Cupid's flower, rebounded. By the flower upon which it fell wounding, Halpin understands the Countess Lettice of Essex, with whom Leicester carried on a clandestine intercourse while her husband was absent in Ireland, who, apprised of the matter, returned in 1576, and was poisoned on the journey. The flower was milk-white, innocent, but purple with love's wound, which denoted her fall or the deeper blush of her husband's murder. The name is 'love in idleness,' which Halpin refers to the listlessness of her heart during the absence of her husband; for on other occasions also Shakespeare uses this popular denomination of the pansy, to denote a love which surprises and affects those who are indolent, unarmed, and devoid of all other feeling and aspiration. While Oberon declares to Puck that he marked the adventure, though the

servant could not, the poet appears to denote the strict mystery which concealed this affair, and which might be known to him, because, as we may remember, the execution of his maternal relative, Edward Arden (1583), was closely connected with it; and because a son of that Lettice, the famous Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, the favourite of Elizabeth, and subsequently the victim of her displeasure, was early a patron and protector of Shakespeare.

How significant then does this little allegorical episode become, which, even when regarded only as a poetic ornament, is full of grace and beauty! Whilst Spenser at that very time had extolled Elizabeth as the 'Faerie Queen,' Shakespeare, on the contrary, represents her rather as a being unapproachable by this world of fancy. His courtesy to the queen becomes transformed into a very serious meaning: for, contrasting with this insanity of love, emphasis is placed upon the other extreme, the victory of Diana over Cupid, of the mind over the body, of maiden contemplativeness over the jugglery of love; and even in other passages of the piece those are extolled as 'thrice blessed, that master so their blood, to undergo such maiden pilgrimage.' But with regard to the bearing of the passage upon the actual purport of the Midsummer-Night's Dream, the poet carries back the mind to a circumstance in real life, which, like an integral part, lies in close parallel with the story of the piece. More criminal and more dissolute acts, prompted by the blind passion of love, were at that time committed in reality than were ever represented in the drama. The ensnaring charm, embodied in a flower, has an effect upon the entanglements of the lovers in the play. And whatever this representation might lack in probability and psychological completeness (for the sweet allegory of the poet was not to be overburdened with too much of the prose of characterisation), the spectator with poetic faith may explain by the magic sap of the flower, or with pragmatic soberness may interpret by analogy with the actual circumstance which the poet has converted into this exquisite allegory.

But it is time that we should return from this digression. We have before said that the piece appears designed to be treated as a dream; not merely in outer form and colouring, but also in inner signification. The errors of that blind intoxication of the senses, which form the main point of the play, appear to us to be an allegorical picture of the errors of

a life of dreams. Reason and consciousness are cast aside in that intoxicating passion as in a dream; Cupid's delight in breach of faith and Jove's merriment at the perjury of the lovers cause the actions of those who are in the power of the God of Love to appear almost as unaccountable as the sins which we commit in a dream. We find moreover that the actions and occupations of Cupid and of the fairies throughout the piece are interwoven or alternate. And this appears to us to confirm most forcibly the intention of the poet to compare allegorically the sensuous life of love with a dream-life; the exchange of functions between Cupid and the fairies is therefore the true poetic embodiment of this comparison. For the realm of dreams is assigned to Shakespeare's fairies; they are essentially nothing else than personified dream-gods, children of the fantasy, which, as Mercutio says, is not only the idle producer of dreams, but also of the caprices of superficial love.

Vaguely, as in a dream, this significance of the fairies rests in the ancient popular belief of the Teutonic races, and Shakespeare, with the instinctive touch of genius, has fashioned this idea into exquisite form. In German '*Alp*' and '*Elfe*' are the same; 'Alp' is universally applied in Germany to a dream-goblin (night-mare). The name of the fairy king Oberon is only Frenchified from Alberon or Alberich, a dwarfish elf, a figure early appearing in old German poems. The character of Puck, or, as he is properly called, Robin Goodfellow, is literally no other than our own '*guter Knecht Ruprecht*;' and it is curious that from this name in German the word 'Rüpel' is derived, the only one by which we can give the idea of the English *clown*, the very part which, in Shakespeare, Puck plays in the kingdom of the fairies. This belief in fairies was far more diffused through Scandinavia than through England; and again in Scotland and England it was far more actively developed than in Germany. Robin Goodfellow especially, of whom we hear in England as early as the thirteenth century, was a favourite in popular traditions, and to his name all the cunning tricks were imputed which we relate of Eulenspiegel and other nations of others. His 'Mad Pranks and Merry Jests' were printed in 1628 in a popular book, which Thoms has recently prepared for his little blue library. Collier places the origin of the book at least forty years earlier, so that Shakespeare might have been acquainted with it. Unquestionably this is the main source of his fairy kingdom; the lyric

parts of the Midsummer-Night's Dream are in tone and colour a perfect imitation of the songs contained in it. In this popular book Robin appears, although only in a passing manner, as the sender of the dreams; the fairies and Oberon, who is here his father, speak to him by dreams before he is received into their community. But that which Shakespeare thus received in the rough form of fragmentary popular belief he developed in his playful creation into a beautiful and regulated world. He here in a measure deserves the merit which Herodotus ascribes to Homer; as the Greek poet has created the great abode of the gods and its Olympic inhabitants, so Shakespeare has given form and place to the fairy kingdom, and with the natural creative power of genius he has breathed a soul into his merry little citizens, thus imparting a living centre to their nature and their office, their behaviour and their doings. He has given embodied form to the invisible and life to the dead, and has thus striven for the poet's greatest glory; and it seems as if it was not without consciousness of this his work that he wrote in a strain of self-reliance that passage in this very play:—

> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.
> Such tricks hath strong imagination;
> That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
> It comprehends some bringer of that joy.

This he has here effected; he has clothed in bodily form those intangible phantoms, the bringers of dreams of provoking jugglery, of sweet soothing, and of tormenting raillery; and the task he has thus accomplished we shall only rightly estimate, when we have taken into account the severe design and inner congruity of this little world.

If it were Shakespeare's object expressly to remove from the fairies that dark ghost-like character (Act III. sc. 2), in which they appeared in Scandinavian and Scottish fable; if it were his desire to portray them as kindly beings in a merry and harmless relation to mortals; if he wished, in their essential office as bringers of dreams, to fashion them in their nature as personified dreams, he carried out this object in wonderful harmony both as regards their actions and their condition. The kingdom

of the fairy beings is placed in the aromatic flower-scented Indies, in the land where mortals live in a half-dreamy state. From hence they come, 'following darkness,' as Puck says, 'like a dream.' Airy and swift, like the moon, they circle the earth; they avoid the sunlight without fearing it, and seek the darkness; they love the moon and dance in her beams; and above all they delight in the dusk and twilight, the very season for dreams, whether waking or asleep. They send and bring dreams to mortals; and we need only recall to mind the description of the fairies' midwife, Queen Mab, in Romeo and Juliet, a piece nearly of the same date with the Midsummer-Night's Dream, to discover that this is the charge essentially assigned to them, and the very means by which they influence mortals. The manner in which Shakespeare has fashioned their inner character in harmony with this outer function is full of profound thought. He depicts them as beings without delicate feeling and without morality, just as in dreams we meet with no check to our tender sensations and are without moral impulse and responsibility. Careless and unscrupulous, they tempt mortals to infidelity; the effects of the mistakes which they have contrived make no impression on their minds; they feel no sympathy for the deep affliction of the lovers, but only delight and marvel over their mistakes and their foolish demeanour. The poet farther depicts his fairies as beings of no high intellectual development. Whoever attentively reads their parts will find that nowhere is reflection imparted to them. Only in one exception does Puck make a sententious remark upon the infidelity of man, and whoever has penetrated into the nature of these beings will immediately feel that it is out of harmony. They can make no direct inward impression upon mortals; their influence over the mind is not spiritual, but throughout material; it is effected by means of vision, metamorphosis, and imitation. Titania has no spiritual association with her friend, but mere delight in her beauty, her 'swimming gait,' and her powers of imitation. When she awakes from her vision there is no reflection: 'Methought I was enamoured of an ass,' she says. 'Oh how mine eyes do hate this visage now!' She is only affected by the idea of the actual and the visible. There is no scene of reconciliation with her husband; her resentment consists in separation, her reconciliation in a dance; there is no trace of reflection, no indication of feeling. Thus, to remind Puck of a past event no abstract

date sufficed, but an accompanying indication, perceptible to the senses, was required. They are represented, these little gods, as natural souls, without the higher human capacities of mind, lords of a kingdom, not of reason and morality, but of imagination and ideas conveyed by the senses; and thus they are uniformly the vehicle of the fancy which produces the delusions of love and dreams. Their will, therefore, only extends to the corporeal. They lead a luxurious, merry life, given up to the pleasure of the senses; the secrets of nature and the powers of flowers and herbs are confided to them. To sleep in flowers, lulled with dances and songs, with the wings of painted butterflies to fan the moonbeams from their eyes, this is their pleasure; the gorgeous apparel of flowers and dewdrops is their joy. When Titania wishes to allure her beloved, she offers him honey, apricots, purple grapes, and dancing. This life of sense and nature is seasoned by the power of fancy and by desire after all that is most choice, most beautiful, and agreeable. They harmonise with nightingales and butterflies; they wage war with all ugly creatures, with hedgehogs, spiders, and bats; dancing, play, and song are their greatest pleasures; they steal lovely children, and substitute changelings; they torment decrepit old age, toothless gossips, aunts, and the awkward company of the players of Pyramus and Thisbe, but they love and recompense all that is pure and pretty. Thus was it of old in the popular traditions; their characteristic trait of favouring honesty among mortals and persecuting crime was certainly borrowed by Shakespeare from these traditions in the Merry Wives of Windsor, though not in this play. The sense of the beautiful is the one thing which elevates the fairies not only above the beasts but also above the ordinary mortal, when he is devoid of all fancy and uninfluenced by beauty. Thus, in the spirit of the fairies, in which this sense of the beautiful is so refined, it is intensely ludicrous that the elegant Titania should fall in love with an ass's head. The only pain which agitates these beings is jealousy, the desire of possessing the beautiful sooner than others; they shun the distorting quarrel; their steadfast aim and longing is for undisturbed enjoyment. But in this sweet jugglery they neither appear constant to mortals nor do they carry on intercourse among themselves in monotonous harmony. They are full also of wanton tricks and railleries, playing upon themselves and upon mortals, pranks which never hurt, but which often torment.

This is especially the property of Puck, who 'jests to Oberon,' who is the 'lob' at this court, a coarser goblin, represented with broom or threshing-flail, in a leathern dress, and with a dark countenance, a roguish but awkward fellow, skilful at all transformations, practised in wilful tricks, but also clumsy enough to make mistakes and blunders contrary to his intention.

We mortals are unable to form anything out of the richest treasure of the imagination without the aid of actual human circumstances and qualities. Thus, even in this case, it is not difficult to discover in society the types of human nature which Shakespeare deemed especially suitable as the original of his fairies. There are, particularly among women of the middle and upper ranks, natures which are not accessible to higher spiritual necessities, which take their way through life with no serious and profound reference to the principles of morality or to intellectual objects, yet with a decided inclination and qualification for all that is beautiful, agreeable, and graceful, though without being able to reach even here the higher attainments of art. They grasp readily as occasion offers all that is tangible; they are ready, dexterous, disposed for tricks and raillery, ever skilful at acting parts, at assuming appearances, at disguises and deceptions, seeking to give a stimulant to life only by festivities, pleasures, sport and jest. These light, agreeable, rallying, and sylph-like natures, who live from day to day and have no spiritual consciousness of a common object in life, whose existence is a playful dream, full of grace and embellishment, but never a life of higher aim, have been chosen by Shakespeare with singular tact as the originals from whose fixed characteristics he gave form and life to his airy fairies.

We can now readily perceive why, in this work, the 'rude mechanicals' and clowns, and the company of actors with their burlesque comedy, are placed in such rude contrast to the tender and delicate play of the fairies. Prominence is given to both by the contrast afforded between the material and the aërial, between the awkward and the beautiful, between the utterly unimaginative and that which, itself fancy, is entirely woven out of fancy. The play acted by the clowns is, as it were, the reverse of the poet's own work, which demands all the spectator's reflective and imitative fancy to open to him this aërial world, whilst in the other nothing at all is left to the

imagination of the spectator. The homely mechanics, who compose and act merely for gain, and for the sake of so many pence a-day, the ignorant players, with hard hands and thick heads, whose unskilful art consists in learning their parts by heart, these men believe themselves obliged to represent Moon and Moonshine by name in order to render them evident; they supply the lack of side-scenes by persons, and all that should take place behind the scenes they explain by digressions. These rude doings are disturbed by the fairy chiefs with their utmost raillery, and the fantastical company of lovers mock at the performance. Theseus, however, draws quiet and thoughtful contemplation from these contrasts. He shrinks incredulously from the too-strange fables of love and its witchcraft; he enjoins that imagination should amend the play of the clowns, devoid as it is of all fancy. The real, that in this work of art has become 'nothing,' and the 'airy nothing,' which in the poet's hand has assumed this graceful form, are contrasted in the two extremes; in the centre is the intellectual man, who participates in both, who regards the one, namely, the stories of the lovers, the poets by nature, as art and poetry, and who receives the other, presented as art, only as a thanksworthy readiness to serve and as a simple offering.

It is the combination of these skilfully obtained contrasts into a whole which we especially admire in this work. The age subsequent to Shakespeare could not tolerate it, and divided it in twain. Thus sundered, this æsthetic fairy poetry and the burlesque caricature of the poet have made their own way. Yet in 1631 the Midsummer-Night's Dream appears to have been represented in its perfect form. We know that in this year it was acted at the Bishop of Lincoln's house on a Sunday, and that a puritanical tribunal in consequence sentenced Bottom to sit for twelve hours in the porter's room belonging to the bishop's palace, wearing his ass's head. But even in the seventeenth century 'the merry conceited humours of Bottom the weaver' were acted as a separate burlesque. The work was attributed to the actor Robert Cox, who, in the times of the civil wars, when the theatres were suppressed, wandered over the country, and, under cover of rope-dancing, provided the people thus depressed by religious hypocrisy with the enjoyment of small exhibitions, which he himself composed under the significant name of 'drolls,' and in which the stage returned

as it were to the merry interludes of old. In the form in which Cox at this time produced the farce of Bottom, it was subsequently transplanted to Germany by our own Andreas Gryphius, the schoolmaster and pedant Squenz being the chief character. How expressive these burlesque parts of the piece must have been in Shakespeare's time to the public, who were acquainted with original drolleries of this kind, *we* now can scarcely imagine. Nor do we any longer understand how to perform them; the public at that time, on the contrary, had the types of the caricatured pageants in this play and in Love's Labour's Lost still existing among them.

On the other hand, Shakespeare's fairy world became the source of a complete fairy literature. The kingdom of the fairies had indeed appeared, in the chivalric epics, many centuries before Shakespeare. The oldest Welsh tales and romances relate of the contact of mortals with this invisible world. The English of Shakespeare's time possessed a romance of this style written by Launfall, in a translation from the French. The romance of 'Huon of Bordeaux' had been earlier (in 1570) translated by Lord Berners into English. From it, or from the popular book of 'Robin Goodfellow,' Shakespeare may have borrowed the name of Oberon. From the reading of Ovid he probably gave to the fairy queen the name of Titania, while among his contemporaries, and even by Shakespeare, in the Midsummer-Night's Dream, she is called 'Queen Mab.' In those old chivalric romances, in Chaucer, in Spenser's allegorical Faerie Queen, the fairies are utterly different beings, without distinct character or office; they concur with the whole world of chivalry in the same monotonous description and want of character. But the Saxon fairy legends afforded Shakespeare a hold for renouncing the romantic art of the pastoral poets and for passing over to the rude popular taste of his fellow-countrymen. He could learn melodious language, descriptive art, the brilliancy of romantic pictures, and the sweetness of visionary images from Spenser's Faerie Queen; but he rejected his portrayal of this fairy world and grasped at the little pranks of Robin Goodfellow, where the simple faith of the people was preserved in pure and unassuming form. In a similar way in Germany, at the restoration of popular life at the time of the Reformation, the chivalric and romantic notions of the world of spirits were cast aside; men returned to popular belief, and we read nothing which reminds

us so much of Shakespeare's fairy world as the theory of elementary spirits by our own Paracelsus. From the time that Shakespeare adopted the mysterious ideas of this mythology, and the homely expression of them in prose and verse, we may assert that the popular Saxon taste became more and more predominant in him. In Romeo and Juliet and in the Merchant of Venice there is an evident leaning towards both sides, and necessarily so, as the poet is here still occupied upon subjects completely Italian. Working, moreover, at the same time upon historical subjects, settled the poet, as it were, fully in his native soil, and the delineation of the lower orders of the people in Henry IV. and V. shows that he felt at home there. From the period of these pieces we find no longer the conceit-style, the love of rhyme, the insertion of sonnets, and similar forms of the artificial lyric; and that characteristic delight in simple popular songs, which shows itself even here in the fairy choruses, takes the place of the discarded taste. The example given in Shakespeare's formation of the fairy world had, however, little effect. Lilly, Drayton, Ben Jonson, and other contemporaries and successors took full possession of the fairy world for their poems, in part evidently influenced by Shakespeare, but none of them has understood how to follow him even upon the path already cleared. Among the many productions of this kind Drayton's 'Nymphidia' is the most distinguished. The poem turns upon Oberon's jealousy of the fairy knight Pigwiggen; it paints the fury of the king with quixotic colouring, and treats of the combat between the two in the style of the chivalric romances, seeking, like them, its main charm in the descriptions of the little dwellings, implements, and weapons of the fairies. If we compare this with Shakespeare's magic creation, which derives its charm entirely from the reverent thoughtfulness with which the poet clings with his natural earnestness to popular legends, leaving intact this childlike belief and preserving its object undesecrated; if we compare the two together, we shall perceive most clearly the immense distance at which our poet stood even from the best of his contemporaries.

We have frequently referred to the necessity of seeing Shakespeare's plays performed, in order to be able to estimate them fully, based as they are upon the joint effect of poetic and dramatic art. It will, therefore, be just to mention the representation which this most difficult of all theatrical tasks of

a modern age has met with in all the great stages of Germany. And, that we may not be misunderstood, we will premise that, however strongly we insist upon this principle, we yet, in the present state of things, warn most decidedly against all over-bold attempts at Shakespearian representation. If we would perform dramas in which such an independent position is assigned to the dramatic art as it is in these, we must before everything possess a histrionic art independent and complete in itself. But this art has with us declined with poetic art, and amid the widely distracting concerns of the present time it is scarcely likely soon to revive. A rich, art-loving prince, endowed with feeling for the highest dramatic delights, and ready to make sacrifices on their behalf, could possibly effect much, were he to invite together to one place, during an annual holiday, the best artists from all theatres, and thus to re-cast the parts of a few of the Shakespearian pieces. Even then a profound judge of the poet must take the general management of the whole. If all this were done, a play like the Midsummer-Night's Dream might be at last attempted. This fairy play was produced upon the English stage when they had boys early trained for the characters; without this proviso it is ridiculous to desire the representation of the most difficult parts, with powers utterly inappropriate. When a girl's high treble utters the part of Oberon, a character justly represented by painters with abundant beard, and possessing all the dignity of the calm ruler of this hovering world; when the rude goblin Puck is performed by an affected actress, when Titania and her suite appear in ball-costume, without beauty or dignity, for ever moving about in the hopping motion of the dancing chorus, in the most offensive ballet-fashion that modern unnaturalness has created—what then becomes of the sweet charm of these scenes and figures which should appear in pure aërial drapery, which in their sport should retain a certain elevated simplicity, and which in the affair between Titania and Bottom, far from unnecessarily pushing the awkward fellow forward as the principal figure, should understand how to place the ludicrous character at a modest distance, and to give the whole scene the quiet charm of a picture? If it be impossible to act these fairy forms at the present day, it is equally so with the clowns. The common nature of the mechanics when they are themselves is perhaps intelligible to our actors; but when they perform their work of art few actors of the present day

possess the self-denial that would lead them to represent this most foolish of all follies with solemn importance, as if in thorough earnestness, instead of overdoing its exaggeration, self-complacently working by laughter and smiling at themselves. Unless this self-denial be observed, the first and greatest object of these scenes, that of exciting laughter, is inevitably lost. Lastly, the middle class of mortals introduced between the fairies and the clowns, the lovers driven about by bewildering delusions, what sensation do they excite, when we see them in the frenzy of passion wandering through the wood in kid-gloves, in knightly dress, conversing after the manner of the refined world, devoid of all warmth, and without a breath of this charming poetry? How can knightly accoutrements suit Theseus, the kinsman of Hercules, and the Amazonian Hippolyta? Certain it is that in the fantastic play of an unlimited dream, from which time and place are effaced, these characters ought not to appear in the strict costume of Greek antiquity; but still less, while one fixed attire is avoided, should we pass over to the other extreme, and transport to Athens a knightly dress, and a guard of Swiss halberdiers. We can only compare with this mistake one equally great, that of adding a disturbing musical accompaniment, inopportunely impeding the rapid course of the action, and interrupting this work of fancy, this delicate and refined action, this ethereal dream, with a march of kettledrums and trumpets, just at the point where Theseus is expressing his thoughts as to the unsubstantial nature of these visions. And amid all these modern accompaniments, the simple balcony of the Shakespearian stage was retained, as if in respect to stage apparatus we were to return to those days! This simplicity moreover was combined with all the magnificence customary at the present day. Elements thus contradictory and thus injudiciously united, tasks thus beautiful and thus imperfectly discharged, must always make the friend of Shakespearian performances desire that, under existing circumstances, they were rather utterly renounced.

ROMEO AND JULIET.

We have pointed out our idea that Shakespeare designed the two comedies of Love's Labour's Lost and Won in an intentional contrast to each other. We shall subsequently perceive that his thoughtful Muse delighted, still more repeatedly, in placing even other dramas in a similar inner relation to each other; and it is possible that even the Midsummer-Night's Dream was designed as a counterpart to Romeo and Juliet, in which the same theme is treated in the strongest and most glaring contrast possible. The comedy, as we stated, seems to us to have originated about the year 1595, the same year in which the poet may have put the finishing touch to this tragedy, which almost all editors consider to have occupied him for a series of years since 1591. There is an early unauthenticated print of the play dated 1597, which some regard as a mutilated pirated edition of the tragedy as we read it (essentially according to the improved and enlarged quarto edition of 1599), but the latest editors consider it to be the text (spoiled, indeed) of an older work of the poet while yet young.[1] In comparing it with the present play we observe the improving hand of the poet, just as in Henry VI., in various instructive touches of emendation, a series of masterly strokes show the advancing mind in all important additions, which almost always affect the finest points of poetical and psychological completion; in those passages, for instance, where he purposes to give more rhetorical force to the reproving speeches of Prince Escalus, to delineate more intelligibly the depth of affection in the lovers and the fatally concealed fervour of Romeo's passionate mind, to impress more sharply the explanatory lessons of the monk, and to work out connectedly and completely the natural succession of the emotions of the soul in the violent catastrophe

[1] Both copies are to be found in Mommsen's critical edition of Romeo and Juliet. Oldenburg, 1859.

of the lovers. Even in the older defective plot the manner of characterisation exhibits such power and certainty, that if excellent existing sources and perhaps still more excellent conjectured ones had not been before the poet, the work would be all the greater marvel, the more unripe his age when he first undertook it. For the outward form of the work bears in every way the marks of a youthful hand. The abundant rhymes, often used alternately, the sonnet-form, the thoughts and the expressions taken even from Shakespeare's sonnet-poetry and from that of his contemporaries, indicate distinctly the period of its origin. It is striking that in this admired piece there are more highly pathetic and pompously profound expressions and unnatural images than in any other of Shakespeare's works; the diction too in many passages, and in the most beautiful ones, is scarcely that of the dramatic style. The mere youth of the poet sufficiently accounts for both these peculiarities; the one proceeds partly from the immediate source which Shakespeare had before him, namely, an English poem by Brooke, abounding with conceits and antitheses; the other—that is, the non-dramatic and rather lyric diction of single passages—is intimately connected with the subject itself, and bears evidence to that genius which we admire beyond everything in Shakespeare's psychological art, even as regards his employment and treatment of the mere outward form of poetry.

In our interpretations of Shakespeare's works we shall rarely tarry upon their merely formal beauties; to analyse them is to destroy them; and he who is not naturally struck by them will never feel them through explanation. Nevertheless this poet is in every point so extraordinary and uncommon, that in the play before us an æsthetic analysis allows us in some passages to exhibit this poetic charm and to fathom depths of poetry in comparison with which every other work must appear shallow. We will briefly adduce these considerations, in order that we may subsequently advance unimpeded in our explanation of the dramatic action.

Every reader must feel that in Romeo and Juliet, in spite of the severe dramatic bearing of the whole, an essentially lyric character prevails in some parts. This lies in the nature of the subject. When the poet exhibits to us the love of Romeo and Juliet in collision with outward circumstances, he is throughout on dramatic ground; when he depicts the lovers

in their happiness, in the idyllic peace of blissful union, he necessarily passes to lyric ground, where thoughts and feelings speak alone, and not actions, such as the drama demands. There are in our present play three such passages of an essentially lyric nature: Romeo's declaration of love at the ball, Juliet's soliloquy at the beginning of the bridal-night, and the parting of the two on the succeeding morning. If in parts such as these, where the poet's great art for displaying character and motive found far less scope than in the dramatic and animated parts of the piece, he would maintain an equally high position, he must endeavour to give the greatest possible charm and value to his lyric expressions. This he did; it is to these very passages that every reader will always revert most readily. But while in these very passages he sought after the truest and fullest expression and the purest and most genuinely poetic form, we might point out an artifice (*Kunstgriff*), or we might better say, a trick of nature (*Naturgriff*), which he employed in order to give these passages the deepest and most comprehensive background. In all three passages he has adhered to fixed lyric forms of poetry, each in harmony with the circumstances of the case, and well filled with the usual images and ideas of the respective styles. The three species we allude to are: the sonnet, the epithalamium or nuptial poem, and the dawn-song (*Tagelied*).

Romeo's declaration of love to Juliet at the ball is certainly not confined within the usual limits of a sonnet, yet in structure, tone and treatment it agrees with this form, or is derived from it. This style of lyric is devoted to love by Petrarca, of whom this play on love reminds us. Following his example, spiritual love alone in all its brightness and sacredness has been almost always celebrated in this style of poetry; never, with few exceptions, has the sensual aspect of love been sung in it. Yet every genuine heart-affection, when not arising from a mere intoxication of the senses, but taking hold of the spiritual and moral nature of the man, is in its beginning and origin ever of an entirely inward nature. A beautiful form may for the moment affect our senses, but it is only the whole being of a man that can enchain us lastingly, and the first conception of this being is ever purely spiritual. It is thus as judicious as it is true that in this first meeting, when the suitor approaches his beloved, like a holy shrine, with all the reverence of innocence, and avows his love with purely

spiritual feeling, the poet has adhered to the canonical style of the lyric, as expressing the first pure emotions of love.

Juliet's soliloquy before the bridal-night (Act III. sc. 2), (and this Halpin has pointed out in the writings of the Shakespeare Society in his usual intellectual manner), calls to mind the epithalamium, or nuptial poems of the age. The reader should read this wonderful passage, and the actress act it, with that exquisite feeling which moderates the audible words into silent thoughts. In the allegorical myth of the hymeneal or nuptial poems Halpin points out that Hymen plays the principal part, Cupid remaining concealed, until at the door of the bridal-chamber the elder brother surrenders his office to the younger. We must suppose that Juliet knew these songs and these ideas, and that in her soliloquy she uses images familiar to her. Juliet, according to the ideas of those poems, supposes the presence of Love as understood; she designates him with the nickname of 'the run-away'[1] (the *δραπετίδας* of Moschus), which had belonged to him originally, because he was in the habit of running away from his mother. She longs for the night, when Romeo may leap to her arms unseen; 'even the run-away's eyes may wink,' she says; he may not, she means, fulfil his office of illuminating the bridal chamber, where in this case secrecy and darkness are enjoined. Halpin thinks that the blind Cupid may have been an emblem of this kind of mysterious marriage union, for in the bedchamber of Imogen, who had contracted a similar secret marriage, two blind Cupids are introduced. The absence of the wedding feast, usual under happier auspices, leads Juliet naturally to these thoughts. No other voice sang to her the bridal song; she sings it, as it were, herself; and this casts a farther melancholy charm over this passage, for the absence of the hymeneal feast was considered in olden times as an evil omen, and thus it proves to be here.

The scene of Romeo's interview by night with Juliet afforded the Italian novelists, after their rhetorical fashion, opportunity for lengthy speeches; Shakespeare draws over it the veil of chastity which never with him is wanting when required, and he permits us only to hear the echo of the happiness and the danger of the lovers. In this farewell scene there is no play of mind and ingenuity, as in the sonnet, but feelings and

[1] This interpretation Staunton rightly declares as indisputable, and Halpin's explanation seems to us wholly unshaken by Grant White's attack (in 'Shakespeare's Scholar,' 1856).

forebodings are at work; the sad gleams of the predicting heart shine through the gloom of a happy past, which the painful farewell of the present terminates. The poet's model in this scene (Act III. sc. 2) is a kind of dialogue poem, which took its rise at the time of the Minnesingers, and was designated the dawn-song. In England these dawn-songs were also in vogue. The song to which allusion is made in Romeo and Juliet itself, and which is printed in the first volume of the papers of the Shakespeare Society, is expressive of this fact. The uniform purport of these songs is that two lovers, who visit each other by night for secret intercourse, appoint a watcher, who wakes them at dawn of day, when, unwilling to separate, they dispute between themselves or with the watchman as to whether the light proceeds from the sun or moon, and the waking song from the nightingale or the lark. The purport of this dialogue is of a similar character, though it indeed far surpasses every other dawn-song in poetic charm and merit.

Thus this tragedy, which in its mode of treatment has always been considered as the representative of all love-poetry, has in these passages formally admitted three principal styles, which may represent the erotic lyric. While it has profoundly made use of all that is most true and deep in the innermost nature of love, the poet has imbued himself also with those external forms which the human mind had long before created in this domain of poetry. He preferred rather not to be original than to misconceive the form suitable; he preferred to borrow the expression and the style which centuries long had fashioned and developed, for in this the very test of their genuineness and durability lay; and thus the lyric love-poetry of all ages is, as it were, recognised in the forms, images, and expressions employed in this tragedy of love.

The story of our drama has been traced back as far as Xenophon's 'Ephesiaca.' The essential elements of it appear in the thirty-second novel of Massuccio (1470), from which they were borrowed by Luigi da Porto, who is generally spoken of as the original narrator of the history of Romeo and Juliet ('La Giulietta,' 1535). But Shakespeare's play does not even indirectly proceed from these sources, but from a novel of Bandello's, which afforded a dramatist capable of the task a material very different to that presented by Boccaccio in his 'Giletta of Narbonne.' This narrative, 'la sfortunata morte di due infelicissimi amanti' (Bandello, *II.* 9), afforded Arthur Brooke, a

well-known poet belonging to the pre-Shakespeare time, material for a narrative poem entitled Romeus and Juliet, which first appeared in 1562, and was reprinted in 1587. A poetic Italian narrative of the subject in octavo (L'infelice amore dei due fedelissimi amanti Giulia e Romeo, scritto in ottava rima da Clitia, nobile Veronese. Venezia. 1553.) had appeared even before Bandello's; whether Brooke employed it as well as Bandello's we cannot decide, as we have not seen it. On the other hand, in his preface of 1562, Brooke praises a dramatic piece, which had set forth the same argument on the stage with more commendation than he could look for in his work. This piece, if Brooke had used it, and if we might judge of it from his own work, must have been one of the important dramas previous to Shakespeare. Whether Shakespeare knew it and made use of it, we know not. We know that he had Brooke's poem before him, the colouring and story of which, as well as the characters of the nurse, of Mercutio, and of the two principal figures, were so prepared for his use that the poet had far lighter work in this disproportionably difficult material than in All's Well that Ends Well. The story itself, which is moreover conspicuous among Italian novels for the motive that artistically pervades it, appears in Brooke's poem with the superficial oratory of the South exchanged for the profound feeling of the North, and the character of Romanic elegance transformed into the Teutonic soul full of violent passion. In power and exuberance the Italian novels are left far behind, indeed a certain overloading testifies to the poet's richness of feeling. Many fine touches in the Shakespearian play are more distinctly apparent after reading this narrative, and we are thus afforded a palpable proof, other instances of which also exist, of how much Shakespeare has often hidden under few words and allusions. If indeed we pass from Brooke's poem to Shakespeare's tragedy, we find the subject again infinitely raised in the drama, and once more the many appendages of Romanic conventionality and rhetorical tinsel are thrust out in the sieve of a genuine Germanic nature. In Brooke's poem, sensual gratification alternates with the counterbalance of a cold morality, voluptuousness with wisdom, and Ovid-like luxuriance with a pedantic dogmatical tone; above contrasts such as these, Shakespeare rose with the pure ingenuousness of a poet who identifies himself with his subject. With Brooke, all is the play of fortune, chance, destiny—a touching story of two lovers subjected to an alternation of

prosperity and misfortune. But with Shakespeare, the piece is the necessary history of *all* strong *love*, which in itself deep, true, and living, is not guided and affected by any external influence, but which rises superior to every other passion and emotion, beating proudly against the barriers of conventionality, occupied to excess alone with itself and its satisfaction; deriding the representations of cold discretion; aye, over-bold, defying fate itself, and neglecting its warnings to its own ruin.

If we would now proceed to investigate the central point of this work, the poet, it seems to us, has afforded a twofold clue to it, with greater distinctness than is his wont. If we simply conceive the two principal figures in their disposition and circumstances, the idea of the whole becomes apparent of itself from the dispassionate consideration of the simple facts; the action alone and its motives do not suffer it to be mistaken. But besides this the poet has also by direct teaching given the clue which the reader or spectator might not have perhaps discovered from the motives and issue of the action. This twofold assistance, therefore, must guide us in our considerations; and we will first take the latter, which by a shorter path, though certainly with a more limited manner, accomplishes our purpose.

The oldest biblical story exhibits work and toil as a curse which is laid on the human race; if it be so, God has mixed with the bitter lot that which can sweeten it: true activity is just that which most ennobles the vocation of man, and which transforms the curse into the richest blessing. On the other hand, there are affections and passions given us to heighten our enjoyment of life; but pursued in an unfair degree, they transform their pleasure and blessing into curse and ruin. Of no truth is the world of actual experience so full, and to none does the poetry of Shakespeare more frequently and more expressively point.

Arthur Brooke, Shakespeare's immediate source for his drama, interspersed his narrative with the reflection that all that is most noble in man is produced by great passions; but that these incur the danger of carrying the man beyond himself and his natural limits, and thus of ruining him. In our drama the passion of love is depicted in this highest degree of attraction and might, affording at once the fullest testimony to its ennobling and to its destroying power. The poet has exhibited the good and bad attributes of this demon in that

superior manner with which we are familiar in him, and with that noble ingenuousness and impartiality that render it impossible to say whether he may have thought more of the exalting power of love, or less of its debasing influence. He has depicted its pure and its dangerous effects, its natural nobleness and its inherent wiles, with such evenness of mind that we are struck with admiration at this mighty power, just as much as we are with wonder at the weakness into which it degenerates. There are but few persons who are capable of receiving the poet's view and of allowing his representation to influence them on both sides with equal power and with equal impartiality. Most men incline predominantly to one side only; readers of more sensual ardour regard the might of love in this couple as an ideal power, as a lawful and desirable authority; others of more moral severity look upon it as an excessive tyranny which has violently stifled all other inclinations and attractions.

Shakespeare has exhibited in this play the opposite extremes of all human passion, love and hate; and as in the Midsummer-Night's Dream the picture of maidenly discretion afforded a pleasing contrast to the intoxication of fickle sensual love, so here in the midst of the world agitated by love and hate he has placed Friar Laurence, whom experience, retirement, and age have deprived of inclination to either. He represents, as it were, the part of the chorus in this tragedy, and expresses the leading idea of the piece in all its fulness, namely, that excess in any enjoyment, however pure in itself, transforms its sweet into bitterness; that devotion to any single feeling, however noble, bespeaks its ascendancy; that this ascendancy moves the man and woman out of their natural spheres; that love can only be an accompaniment to life, and that it cannot completely fill out the life and business of the man especially; that in the full power of its first feeling it is a paroxysm of happiness, the very nature of which forbids its continuance in equal strength; that, as the poet says in an image, it is a flower that

> Being smelt, with that part cheers each part;
> Being tasted, slays all senses with the heart.

These ideas are placed by the poet in the lips of the wise Laurence in almost a moralising manner with gradually increasing emphasis, as if with the careful intention that no doubt

should remain of his meaning. He utters them in his first soliloquy, under the simile of the vegetable world, which is occupying his attention; but he introduces them merely *instructively*, and as if without application; he expresses them *warningly* when he unites the lovers, and assists their union; and finally he repeats them *reprovingly* to Romeo in his cell, when he sees the latter 'dismembering' himself and his own work, and he predicts what the end will be.

'Nought,' says the holy man in the first of these passages (Act II. sc. 3),

> Nought so vile that on the earth doth live,
> But to the earth some special good doth give;
> Nor aught so good, but, strain'd from that fair use,
> Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse:
> Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied;
> And vice sometime's by action dignified.
> Within the infant rind of this small flower
> Prison hath residence, and med'cine power:
> For this being smelt, with that part cheers each part;
> Being tasted, slays all senses with the heart.
> Two such opposed foes encamp them still
> In man as well as herbs, grace and rude will;
> And, when the worser is predominant,
> Full soon the canker death eats up that plant.

We see plainly that these are the two qualities which make Romeo a hero and a slave of love; in happiness with his Juliet, he displays his 'grace' in so rich a measure that he quickly triumphs over a being so gifted; in misfortune he destroys all the charm of these gifts by the 'rude will' with which Laurence reproaches him. In the second of the passages pointed out, Romeo, on the threshold of his happiness, challenges love-devouring death to do what he dare, so that he may only call Juliet his; and in a passage which the poet first inserted in his revision of the play, showing how the good may be strained beyond its just use, Friar Laurence tells him in warning reproof that

> These violent delights have violent ends,
> And in their triumph die; like fire and powder,
> Which as they kiss, consume. The sweetest honey
> Is loathsome in his own deliciousness,
> And in the taste confounds the appetite:
> Therefore, love moderately; long love doth so.

In the same manner when Laurence sees the 'fond man' in his cell in womanly tears, degenerated from his manly nature,

and despairingly cast down, his reproving words again refer to his first instructive remarks upon the abuse of all noble gifts. 'Thou sham'st,' he says to him (and this too has been first added in the revised edition):

> Thou sham'st thy shape, thy love, thy wit;
> Which, like an usurer, abound'st in all,
> And usest none in that true use indeed
> Which should bedeck thy shape, thy love, thy wit:
> Thy noble shape is but a form of wax,
> Digressing from the valour of a man;
> Thy dear love sworn but hollow perjury,
> Killing that love which thou hast vowed to cherish;
> Thy wit, that ornament to shape and love,
> Misshapen in the conduct of them both,
> Like powder in a skilless soldier's flask,
> Is set a-fire by thine own ignorance,
> And thou dismember'd with thine own defence.

This significant image recurs to mind when we see Romeo subsequently rushing to death, and procuring from the apothecary the poison by which the trunk is

> discharged of breath
> As violently as hasty powder fired
> Doth hurry from the fatal cannon's womb.

Thrice has the poet with this same simile designated the burning flame of this love, which too quickly causes the paroxysm of happiness to consume itself and to vanish, and he could choose no moral aphorism which could with the simple expressiveness of this image have demonstrated the aim of his representation.

But as Tieck criticised the conclusion of Love's Labour's Lost, Schlegel and many others have opposed the moral which Friar Laurence draws from the story. Romeo's words of rebuff to the holy aged man, who with cold blood preaches morals and philosophy to the lover, those words: 'thou canst not speak of what thou dost not feel,' have been the guide of the Romanticists in their estimate of Laurence and his wisdom. That the words are spoken in the deepest distraction of a despairing man, whom defiance renders insusceptible of consolation, and passion incapable of all reflection, was never taken into consideration by them. And yet his Laurence is in this very scene neither delineated as a mechanical and pedantic moraliser, nor as a dry stoic. He has only too much sympathising regard for the lovers, he enters upon a dangerous plan

in order to secure their union, and the plan almost ruins himself. He attempts, indeed, to comfort this desponding man of love with the cordial of philosophy, but he devises also real means of consolation as good as any that *the lover himself* could have devised, and such indeed as he in his despairing defiance *could not have devised* for himself, and which not only comfort him, but for the moment cure him. Nor is it only the task of Laurence to reproach the foolish man, but even the nurse can do so, even his Juliet might do so. We err—this has Schlegel himself said—in taking this pair as an ideal of virtue, but we err perhaps still more from the poet's aim in passionately siding with their passion. We have no choice left in that case but to blame the tragedist for unfair and unjust cruelty. For in their death following upon their life, we do not mean to say that Shakespeare made use of a narrow morality, that he allowed divinity and destiny to punish these mortals for the sake of this fault, just because an arbitrary law of custom or religion condemned it. Shakespeare's wise morality, if we may judge from those very sayings which he placed in the lips of Friar Laurence in that first soliloquy, knew of no such virtue and no such crime, warranting once for all reward or punishment. We have heard him affirm that from circumstance 'virtue itself turns vice,' and 'vice sometime's by action dignified;' and as he here depicts a love which sprang from the purest and most innocent grounds, in its ascendancy, in its over-sensibility, and in its self-avenging degeneracy, he has elsewhere elevated that which we regard simply as sin into pardonable, aye, into great actions; for who would hesitate to break, like Jessica, her filial piety; who would not wish to lie as Desdemona lies? Shakespeare recognises only human gifts and dispositions, and a human freedom, reason, and volition to use them well or ill, madly or with moderation. He recognises only a fate which the man forges for himself from this good or bad use, although he may accuse the powers without him as its author, as Romeo does the 'inauspicious stars.' With him, as throughout actual life, outward circumstances and inward character work one into the other with alternating effect; in this tragedy of love they mutually fashion each other, the one furthers the other, until at last the wheels of destiny and passion are driven into more violent collision, and the end is an overthrow.

Lingering thus on the moral idea of the play, and on the

tragic conclusion to which this idea urges, it may appear as if the poet in delineating this rare love clung with greater stress to the severe judgment of the reflective mind than to the sympathy of the heart, and that he was too much inclined to do this for us to invest him with that strict impartiality which we have before extolled in him. But this reproach vanishes of itself if we carry our eye from the abstract contemplation to the action, from the bare isolated idea to the whole representation, to the living warmth and richness of the circumstances, the intricacies, the motives, and the characters. The idea which we have gathered from the didactic passages of the piece becomes more fully enlightened and enlivened in the consideration of the facts; not only does the moral of the action call forth the abstract idea, but the complete view of all co-operating circumstances, both within and without, challenges the heart and soul: the whole being of the spectator is called into judgment, not alone his head and mind. It is for this reason that the view of the action in all its completeness is ever the only accurate way of arriving at an understanding of one of our poet's plays.

We will now, following out our design, survey our drama also in this second manner, and study it in the broader and more varied aspect of its facts and acting characters. At the conclusion we shall arrive indeed at the same aim, but with our views much more enlarged and informed.

We see two youthful beings of the highest nobility of character and position, endowed with tender hearts and with all the sensual fire of a southern race, standing isolated in two families, who are excited to hatred and murder against each other, and repeatedly fill the town of Verona with blood and uproar. Upon the dark ground of the family hatred the two figures come out the more clearly. In poetry and history cases such as these are not rare; in the gloom of immoral ages and circumstances the brightest visions frequently emerge like lilies from the marsh, and Iphigenias and Cordelias, appearing in the midst of a race of titantic passions, have illustrated this in ancient and modern poetry. Romeo and Juliet share not the deadly hatred which divides their families; the harmlessness of their nature is alien to their wild spirit; much rather upon this same desolate soil a thirsting for love has grown in them to excess; this is more evidently displayed in Romeo, and less consciously so in Juliet, in the one excited rather in opposition

to the contention raging in the streets, in the other arising from a secret repulse of those nearest to her in her home. The head of his enemies, the old Capulet himself, bears testimony of Romeo that 'Verona brags of him, to be a virtuous and well-governed youth.' However much, amid the increasing hindrances to the course of their love, a disproportion and excess of the powers of feeling and affection were developed rapidly and prematurely in both, the two characters were yet originally formed for a harmony of the life of mind and feeling, and rather for fervent and deep, than for excited and extravagant affection. It is no impulse of the senses, it is not even merely self-willed obstinacy which hurries them at last to ruin upon a hazardous and fatal path, but it is the impulse of a touching fidelity and constancy stretching beyond the limits of the grave. The quality of stubborn wilfulness which the friar blames in Romeo—a quality also apparent with womanly moderation in Juliet, when she opposes her parents' plan for her marriage—is certainly in both an heirloom of the hostile family spirit, but it is kept concealed by the peaceful influence of innate tenderness of feeling. It is excited in them only in unhappiness and under the pressure of insufferable circumstances; but even then in these harmless beings it is not pernicious to others, but its ruinous effects turn only against themselves. That which the friar calls 'grace' in the human being, by which outward and inward nobility in appearance and habits is intended, forms the essential nature of both; and if Romeo, according to the words of the friar, in misfortune and despair and under the influence of a defiant spirit, shames his shape, his love, and his wit—that is, all his endowments of person, mind, and heart—these endowments, these even usuriously measured gifts, still belong to his original nature, which appears in him, as in Juliet, in all its lustre when no outer circumstances cross and destroy the peace of their souls. Let us compare the emotions of this love with that of another kind in the Midsummer Night's Dream, which 'formed by the eye, is therefore like the eye full of strange shapes,' habits and varied objects, in order that we may in a new aspect measure the full contrast of this passion and of these characters to those represented in the other play. In the scenes in which the love between Romeo and Juliet is developed, and the family foes become a betrothed and married couple, we see in its full force the elevation of these natures above the universal discord

around them, and above the personal prejudices which generally marked this dissension. The disregard of danger, the readiness for every sacrifice of life, of propriety, of piety, prove the purity and strength of their love beyond every shadow of a doubt. In the more idyllic scenes—those in which the lovers appear in all the happiness of contentment—the poet has poetically heightened the expression of love in such a manner, and has invested it with such a power of feeling, that the truth and the charm of the poetry convince us more and more deeply of the truth and nobility of these natures. And he has done this to such an extent that the poetic spirit and charm which he diffuses over the lovers cause most readers even wholly to overlook and to miss the moral severity of the poet: a fact which certainly fully obviates the above-mentioned reproach of lingering too much upon the shadow-side of the passion, the circumstances, and the characters.

Setting aside the later unravellings of the plot, the mixture of these beautiful and noble qualities of Romeo's nature with elements of evil is early apparent, even when he appears before us previous to his meeting with Juliet. This Romeo might be that servant of love, and our poem might be the volume spoken of in the Two Gentlemen of Verona, in which the writer says that 'love inhabits in the finest wits of all,' but also that 'by love the young and tender wit is turned to folly,' and as the worm in the bud, is blasted; that it loses 'his verdure even in the prime, and all the fair effects of future hopes.' The wise Friar Laurence perceived that 'affliction was enamoured' of the susceptible qualities of this deeply agitated and violent nature, and that he was 'wedded to calamity.' Averse to the family feuds, he is early isolated and alienated from his own house. Oppressed by society repugnant to him, the overflowing feeling is compressed within a bosom which finds no one in whom it may confide. Of refined mind, and of still more refined feelings, he repels relatives and friends who seek him, and is himself repulsed by a beloved one, for whom he entertains rather an ideal and imaginary affection. Reserved, disdainful of advice, melancholy, laconic, vague and subtle in his scanty words, he shuns the light, he is an interpreter of dreams, his disposition is foreboding, and his nature pregnant with fate. His parents stand aloof from him in a certain background of insignificance; he has no heartfelt association with his nearest relatives and friends. The peaceful,

self-sufficient Benvolio, presuming upon a fancied influence over Romeo, is too far beneath him; Mercutio's is a nature too remote from his own. He and Tybalt on the opposite side are the two real promoters and irreconcilable nurturers of the hostile spirit between the two houses. Tybalt appears as a brawler by profession, distinguished by bitter animosity and outward elegance from the merry and cynical Mercutio, who calls him a 'fashion-monger.' Mercutio (whose Italian name in Clitia's poem is Marcuccio de' Verti) affords a perfect contrast to Romeo. He is a man without culture; coarse, rude, and ugly; a scornful ridiculer of all sensibility and love, of all dreams and presentiments; a man who loves to hear himself talk, and in the opinion of his noble friend 'will speak more in a minute than he will stand to in a month;' a man gifted with such a habit of wit, and such a humourous perception of all things, that even in the consciousness of his death-wound, and in the bitterness of anger against the author and manner of the blow, he loses not the expression of his humour. According to the description of himself which he draws in an ironical attack against the good Benvolio, he is a quarrel-seeking brawler, possessing a spirit of innate contradiction, and over-confident in his powers of strength, and as such he proves himself in his meeting with Tybalt. Our Romanticists, according to their fashion, blindly in love with the merry fellow, have started the opinion that Shakespeare despatched Mercutio in Act III. because he blocked up the way for his principal character. This opinion rivals in absurdity Goethe's treatment of this character in his incomprehensible travesty. In the scene with Benvolio, Mercutio, in his humorous manner, casts his own tragic horoscope; two men meeting, so full of quarrel as he, he says to Benvolio, would not live an hour. And this prediction is immediately fulfilled in himself and Tybalt, on this hot day, in the exciting warmth of action: they fall a sacrifice to their hating natures, just as Romeo does to his loving disposition, and for no other purpose but this are they placed in contrast to him. To this insignificant Benvolio and this coarse Mercutio, who degrades the object of his idolatrous love with foul derision, Romeo feels himself little disposed to impart the silent joys and sorrows of his heart, and this constrained reserve works fatally upon his nature and upon his destiny. He entertains an affection, at the time we become acquainted with him, for one Rosaline, a being contrasted to his subsequent love, of

Juno-like figure, fair, with black eyes, stronger physically and mentally than Juliet, a character not formed for ardent love, a niece of Capulet's, and a rejector of his suit. The vague necessity of his heart thus remains unsatisfied; he suffers, according to Brooke's expressive image, the vexing torments of a Tantalus, and the void experienced dries up his soul like a sponge. No wonder that he is subsequently overcome with the sudden intoxication of a nameless happiness, which too powerfully attacks this unfortified soul, sick as it is with longing and privation, and undermined by sorrow.

The Juliet, the heiress of the hostile house, who is to replace Rosaline, lives, unknown to him, in like sorrowful circumstances, though in womanly manner more careless of them. A tender being, small, of delicate frame—a bark not formed for severe shocks and storms—she lives in a domestic intercourse which unconsciously must be inwardly more repulsive to her than the casual intercourse with his friends can be to Romeo. Just as Romeo, when elevated by happiness and not depressed by morbid feelings, appears clever and acute enough, even showing himself in ready repartee equal or superior to Mercutio, so Juliet also possesses similar intellectual ability: an Italian girl, full of cunning self-command and quiet, steady behaviour, she is equally clever at evasion and dissimulation. She has inherited something of determination from her father; by her quick and witty replies she evades Count Paris; not without reason she is called by her father in his anger 'a chop-logick.' How can she—with a mind so full of emotion, and a heart so tender, and with a nature evidencing an originally cheerful disposition—how can she find pleasure in her paternal home, a home at once dull, joyless, and quarrelsome. The old Capulet, her father (a masterly design of the poet's), is, like all passionate natures, a man of unequal temper, and fully calculated to explain the alternate outbursts and pauses in the discord between the houses. At one time, in his zeal, he forgets his crutch, that he may wield the old sword in his aged hands; and again, in merrier mood, he takes part against his quarrelsome nephew with the enemy of his house, who trustfully attends his ball. On one occasion he thinks his daughter too young to marry, and two days afterwards she appears to him 'ripe to be a bride.' Like a good father he leaves the fate of his daughter entirely to her own free choice, in the case of the suitor Paris, and then, in the outburst of his passion, he compels her to a

hated marriage, and threatens her in a brutal manner with blows and expulsion. From sorrow at Tybalt's death he relapses into rage, and from rage, after the apparent yielding of his daughter, he passes into the extreme of mirth. Outward refinement of manner was not to be learned from the man who speaks to the ladies of his ball like a sailor, any more than inward morality was to be expected from the man who had once been a 'mouse-hunter' and had to complain of the jealousy of his wife. The lady Capulet is at once a heartless and unimportant woman, who asks advice of her nurse, who in her daughter's extremest suffering coldly leaves her, and entertains the thought of poisoning Romeo, the murderer of Tybalt. The nurse Angelica, whose whole character is designed in Brooke's narrative, is therefore the real mistress of the house; she manages the mother, she assists the daughter, and fears not to cross the old man in his most violent anger. She is a talker with little modesty, a woman whose society was not likely to make a Diana of Juliet, an instructress without propriety, a confidant with no enduring fidelity, and Juliet at length suddenly rejects her. To these home surroundings may be added a conventional wooing of Count Paris, which for the first time obliges the innocent child to read her heart. Hitherto she had, at the most, experienced a sisterly inclination for her cousin Tybalt, as the least intolerable of the many unamiable beings who formed her society. But how little filial feeling united the daughter to the family is glaringly exhibited in that passage in which, even before she has experienced the worst treatment from her parents, the striking expression escapes her upon the death of this same Tybalt, that if it had been her parents' death, she would have mourned them only with 'modern lamentation.'

Such is the inward condition of both, when for the first time they meet at the ball: *she*, urged by the suit of the count and by her mother's instigations, to regard the guests for the first time with inquiring heart, in all the freshness of youth; *he*, out of humour in his hopeless love for Rosaline, not without reason full of misgiving at crossing the threshold of an enemy's house, his very entrance to which excites Tybalt's fatal hatred, but regardless of life and goaded on by daring friends to compare his disdainful beauty against others. Outward beauty is presupposed in both; at her first appearance he exclaims: 'Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!' To

these outward endowments, inward charms are added. On their first greeting they find occasion to test their versatile intelligence; so that this rare union of physical and mental gifts works at the first moment with a fascinating and attractive charm. His first address to Juliet at the ball is a fine web of witty thought; a play of conceits veils the declaration and the acceptance, which by mutual agreement begun in riddles is ingeniously understood and is cleverly carried on. For it is just this which constitutes the charm of this scene, that as Romeo seems to listen to the sweet devices of Juliet in this strife of thought, so Juliet, in quiet happy appreciation, seems to listen to his similes, equally pleased with his mind and wit as with his feelings; that she delights not only in his kiss, but also that he kisses 'by the book,' that is, with witty allusion and form, cleverly carrying on a given course of thought, after the fashion of the humorous play of wit common to the age. If the reader is conscious of an impression of perfect soundness and purity, here combined with physical beauty and mental superiority—the moral impression, which with true instinct we generally feel most surely and fully at first sight—it will not astonish him afterwards that they both, in the next hour of meeting, follow instinctively and freely the same track.

How the garden scene, which follows this first meeting, is to be regarded, has been pointed out to us by the poet in a few words in the chorus at the conclusion of the first act. Romeo can hope for an interview only at the peril of his life, and Juliet not at all; nature and inclination urge the two enemies to mutual love, and circumstances concur to render this new bond indissoluble. They *are impelled* to seize the first opportunity, and fate comes to the assistance of Juliet and her modesty: she betrays her feelings in a soliloquy by night to the listening Romeo, and has, therefore, nothing more to keep back. The one repelled by the suitor Paris, the other by the disdainful Rosaline, they rush the more readily into each other's extended arms. In the midst of the burning contests of their families, in the subversion of all social barriers around them, how should they think of propriety, and, as Juliet says, 'dwell on form'? In the hurry of the recall, in the terrible choice between never meeting again and for ever belonging to each other, she proposes marriage to Romeo, unscrupulously determined to carry out the bold step. How apparently modesty and maidenly shame strive in her open soul with love and devotion, how

innocence struggles with passion, and the wish to dare to believe alternates with the fear of Romeo's trifling with her weakness; how—and this is a further token of her versatile mind—in the hurry of the moment and in the pressure of passion, she hints with one word at important circumstances and at opposing feelings, since time forbids her to linger with riper reflection on the subject; how she gives and withdraws, speaks and retracts, wishes to manifest her love and yet not to appear frivolous; how she declines his oaths and yet bears in mind the falseness of men; how she delights in her happiness and 'sweet repose,' and nevertheless in this night contract has no joy but rather a foreboding care;—all this alternates in wonderful profusion during the brief hour, and displays a soul of endless depth and richness. We need not deny that in this conduct she steps out of her womanly nature, but such an act is justified before God and the world, by the nature of the beings and the circumstances, by the prompting motives and the impelling necessity, by the innocence of the guileless child, and by their good intentions. The wise recluse himself, in his approval of the object and in the prospect of the restoration of family peace, gives his blessing to the secret union. The hurried perturbation of his young friend alone makes him apprehensive; the passionate impatience of his confessant Juliet leads him not to doubt as to the pure innocence of her conduct. The reader must be cautious in attaching any stain to the heroine of the piece in this aspect of her character. The German at once perhaps feels a scruple at that speedy kiss on their first meeting: but these kisses of courtesy in public society, in and before Shakespeare's time, were an English custom, concerning which there were scruples in France, but not in the country itself.[1] In England again, with a very customary mock modesty, there has been some hesitation as to Juliet's soliloquy on the wedding-day; but nowhere is the shame and charm of innocence so bewitchingly expressed as it is here. We know from the nurse that at any news 'the wanton blood' comes scarlet in her cheeks; and she says herself, in an image taken from the wild falcon who tolerates no society, that when waiting for her lover, 'the unmanned blood' bates in her cheeks. All that she says and thinks, as we before mentioned, she clothes unconsciously,

[1] In Cavendish's Life of Wolsey there is an anecdote which illustrates this difference of custom. In Henry V. also Katherine urges the French custom to her wooer.

as if she had no thoughts of her own for it, in the language of those nuptial songs, which would be used by the noblest and would be heard by the most virtuous. The poet, remarks Halpin, who was once considered a barbarian, does in this way all that he can to prevent an unbecoming word appearing on the lips of his innocent heroine, even at the moment when she is at the highest point of her ardent passion.

And now, after having become thus acquainted with these characters, we shall find, in sad succession, the fates of the lovers and of their houses intelligibly developed out of their own nature, and not out of the chance decrees of the goddess Fortune. Romeo certainly has nothing in his nature which would have actively kept up the strife of the families, but with his reserved temper he also certainly did nothing to relax it. This reserved nature now works in him afresh. Animated by his youthful happiness, he turns indeed suddenly as to a new life, and Mercutio is astonished at the ready wit of his melancholy friend; still his cheerful humour does not go so far as to dispose him to free communication. He hides his successful affection from his friends more carefully than his sorrow for Rosaline; this reserved enjoyment of requited love belongs in general but rarely to the man's nature and temper. His friends were unquestionably more worthy of his confidence than the nurse was of Juliet's; had he communicated his feelings to them, Mercutio would have avoided the wantonly sought combat with Tybalt; Romeo would not have killed Tybalt, and the first seed of the rapidly rising mischief would not have been sown. With considerate moderation Romeo has the prudence to avoid Tybalt, but not to forbear whispering a word in the ear of his friend; much less we may believe can he restrain the flaming fire of vengeance, when the triumphant murderer of his friend returns. When he has killed him, in his stubborn taciturn manner he compresses his complete expectation of a dreaded fate into the words 'I am fortune's fool!' just as subsequently, after Juliet's death, he throws into one sentence his despair and defiance; a more open nature would have at both times avoided the extremity by communication. In him a hidden fire burns with a dangerous flame; his slight forebodings are fulfilled, not because a blind chance causes them to be realised, but because his fatal propensity urges him to rash deeds; he calls that fortune which is the work of his own nature. He is banished by the Duke; and now the poet

shows us in a remarkable parallel the difference between the two characters in the same condition of misery; the nature of the sexes is delineated in these opposite scenes in a wonderful manner. The more tender being, in despair at the first moment, is soon comforted by her own reflection; she is soon even capable of comforting, and is bent upon means of remedy. The stronger man, on the contrary, is wholly crushed; he is quite incapable of self-command, quite inaccessible to consolation. The nature of the woman is not so much changed by this omnipotence of love, but the man's power and self-possession are destroyed by the excess of this one feeling. Juliet has lost her cousin; she had at first feared the death of Romeo, she has next to deplore his banishment; in her helpless condition she has more cause for lamentation and grief than he; her agitation is increased for a moment by violent dissatisfaction if not hatred against Romeo: all her hope rested on the restoration of family unity, and this Romeo has again prevented by Tybalt's death. She declaims against him with unjust vehemence, but she soon repents of this, and reproaches herself when she thinks of his own danger. Seized with this thought, with that happy harmony which belongs to the female nature, she speedily finds courage and consolation, power to endure and to act. Tybalt might indeed have killed him; she bids her tears return to their native spring; she *herself* enumerates the grounds of consolation, grounds to which the unhappy Romeo will not even listen when Friar Laurence enumerates them to him. For a moment the idea of banishment agitates her into complete hopelessness, but she quickly seizes the natural means suggested to her by the nurse for lulling her sorrow, healing separation by the chance of reunion, and the sorrow of love by its joys. Quite otherwise is it with the violent impetuous man in Friar Laurence's cell, in whom, at the word banishment, the long repressed inward emotion breaks forth in fearful lamentation, rendering him incapable of reflection and of action at the time that he stood most in need of both. He had himself passed in excitement through that scene which had caused his banishment, he had reason to feel himself entirely free from reproach in the fatal duel, he hears his mild verdict from the forbearing lips of a friend. All comes to him in infinitely harder form than to Juliet, whom her distracted nurse tormented with mistaken apprehensions. Yet in himself he finds the power of consolation which his Juliet does in a

similar position, aye, even in one outwardly worse, though inwardly better. He rejects the burden of the blessing which descends upon him; like an obstinate child, yielding to uncontrolled grief, he refuses the comfort and the encouragement of his wise friend. The aged recluse is obliged to admonish him that 'such die miserable;' nay, what is more in Romeo's condition, he is obliged to remind him to think of his friend, to live for her who lives for him, who thinks for him, and acts for him. Not the sage alone, but even the nurse, is obliged to scold him and his stubbornness, deaf as he is even to threatening danger. When he draws his sword, when he throws himself down senseless, we see him 'taking the measure of an unmade grave,' solicitous about the man, whom no image of manly duty and dignity, whom the prospect alone of meeting with Juliet, the acme of his loving delight, can cause to be himself again.

The poet has twice made them both in agitating alternation taste the joy and sorrow of love; twice by turns does the delight of love tinge their cheeks with red, and the sorrow of love, drinking up their blood, make them pale. This old song of love, laboured after by a thousand poets, has never been sung in such full strains. The first catastrophe, namely, Tybalt's death, followed upon the meeting in the garden, and touched and tried Romeo the more severely; the second, the betrothal to Paris, followed close upon the bridal-night, and touched and tried Juliet with more cruel force. If in the one Romeo less deserved our approbation, this second stroke placed Juliet in the same position; if the man in the one lost his manly nature, Juliet in the other was carried out of her womanly sphere. Lately elevated by the happiness of Romeo's society, she had lost the delicate line of propriety within which her being moved. Even when her mother speaks of her design of causing Romeo to be poisoned, she plays too wantonly with her words, when she ought rather to have been full of care; and when her mother then announces to her the unasked-for husband, she has lost her former craftiness in delaying the marriage with a mild request or with a clever pretext; she is scornful towards her mother, straightforward and open to her father whose caprice and passion she provokes, and subsequently she trifles with confession and sacred things in a manner not altogether womanly. But in order that, even here, we should not lose our

sympathy with this being, the catastrophe at the same time calls forth all the moral elevation of her nature. When she is abandoned by father and mother, and is at length heartlessly advised by her nurse to separate from Romeo, she throws off even this last support; she rises grandly above the 'ancient damnation,' faithlessness, and perjury, and prefers to strike a death-blow to hand and heart than to turn with perfidious desertion to another. When obstacles cross love, it rises to its utmost height; when compulsion and force would annihilate it, faithfulness and constancy become the sole duty. And this it is which, in the midst of the tragic defeat of this love, glorifies its victory. If the lovers, full of sensual ardour, had once innocently aspired after happiness and enjoyment, they now, without hesitation and with moral steadfastness, hastened towards the death which would inseparably unite them. Overexcited by the alternations of joy and sorrow, agitated by sleepless nights, rendered undutiful on the threshold of a forced marriage, no sooner is Juliet alone, than those sluices of her hopelessness are opened wide which previously womanly dissimulation had closed: she longs to die. But still not even now does she lose her womanly self-command. Her first course is to ask counsel of Friar Laurence; her ultimate design is suicide; her firm will calls the friar into its desperate counsels. It is a fearful adventure upon which Juliet unscrupulously resolves, although shortly before its execution womanly nature and timidity, after all the excitement endured, demand a natural tribute. But at the same time it is an ingeniously hazardous game, practicable to the circumspect Juliet, but not so to a man of such vast passions as Romeo. He had arranged with Laurence to receive intelligence by means of his man, but he had also promised Juliet to omit no opportunity of conveying his greetings to her; he had sent his servant also to Juliet. To such an extent does the impatience of love cross the unimpassioned hand of the trusted watcher over its fate. Balthazar comes with the sad tidings of Juliet's death; it falls upon the man, who in his solitary and fatal mood had, waking or asleep, dreamed and brooded only over death and poison. In the Italian tales, Romeo raves in a long speech; in Shakespeare, one sentence—'Is it even so? then I defy you, stars!' decides the rash, obstinate resolve, with the dumb despair of a nature inwardly tumultuous, such as we know Romeo's to have been. He defies the fate that would have helped him had he

consented to its rule; he crosses it with the self-will of hardened defiance, which, once on the path of evil, only too readily rushes towards the utmost limit, as if delighting in self-annihilation. In this agitation of mind, Romeo, in a moral point of view, will scarcely appear to us any longer accountable. The strength of the impulse of love, which with overwhelming force made him seek for that final union with his Juliet, and the hearty fidelity with which, undoubtedly, he felt himself inviolably bound to follow his dead beloved one in her dread journey, excite in us only the one feeling of painful admiration. Letters from Friar Laurence had been promised him; he asked twice for them, he can no longer wait for them. He travels to Verona in spite of the fact that death rests upon his presence. He purchases the poison; the strongest he can procure, one that shall destroy his life as violently 'as hasty powder fired;' the closed shop is obliged to open on the holiday; it perplexes him not that he brings the apothecary under punishment of death; there is no question as to the cause of the most unnatural tidings. On his way he has heard but with deafened ear the story of Paris' suit, or rather he has heard it not. He goes not to Friar Laurence, the first course of Juliet in a similar position. Death is his only, his first thought, and not, as with Juliet, his last! It came indeed never too late, and could never be missed! He arrives at the churchyard. In his fierce wild mood he falls in with Paris, who endeavours to apprehend him; he knows that he is murdering a guiltless, unrecognised man, but this consideration in his bloody haste restrains him not. Shakespeare has himself added this touch of the murder of Paris to the narrative of the novel. He now sees Juliet undisfigured, in all her brightness and beauty, lying as if alive; it startles him not. He rushes after death; one thought alone urges on this self-willed, uncontrolled spirit, —that of running his 'sea-sick weary bark' upon the 'dashing rocks.' 'A greater Power than we can contradict,' says the noble friar, 'hath thwarted our plans for safety.' It was essentially the fearful power of passion in Romeo; to him may be applied what Shakespeare says of love in Hamlet, that its

> Violent property foredoes itself,
> And leads the will to desperate undertakings,
> As oft as any passion under heaven
> That does afflict our natures.

We cannot accuse any blind accident of fate, nor can we blame any arbitrary exercise of punishment on the part of the poet; it is this tumultuous nature alone, in the violence of one happy and yet fatal passion, which shatters the helm of its own preservation, and exercises justice upon itself. The poet could not let those live who destroyed themselves. And it is the result of a lamentable tender-heartedness, when here and there, in subsequent alterations of the play, the pair have been suffered to live, to the great joy of the public, who were not equal to the profound thought of the poet. On the other hand, in the old tales, and afterwards in Garrick's version of the play, it is equally repugnant to us that Juliet awakes while Romeo yet lives. Schlegel's remarks on this are excellent. The grief and agitation produced were indeed already sufficient; the more innocent bride, linked in happiness or misery to the destiny of her husband, well deserved to reach the end more speedily, and, as it were, unconsciously and rightly was she spared from learning how near and how possible safety had been. The Italian novelists liked this prolongation of the torture, in order to gain an opportunity for a fine pathetic speech. Our poet avoided these extremes of agitation; he has wisely only made use of them when Juliet learns Tybalt's death, and when Romeo yields to despair in Friar Laurence's cell, scenes which do not appear in the Italian novels, but which in the drama excellently serve the purpose of making us acquainted with these sensitive natures and of preparing us for the catastrophe of their fate. In the end, when the utmost had happened, it was more human to be sparing of torture, and rather to restore composure to the soul. Over the grave of this unbounded single love, general irreconcilable hate is extinguished, and peace is again restored to the families and to the town. Just as this vehemence of love could arise only amid the narrowing hate of the families, and amid the continual fear of disturbance, so the hate of the families seemed only able to be extinguished by the sacrifice of their noblest members. The exuberance of the love which killed them overflowed after their death, and the blood shed prepared the soil for reconciliation, which could not take root before. The happiness of their love was, as it says in the Midsummer-Night's Dream,

> momentary as a sound,
> Swift as a shadow, short as any dream:

> Brief as the lightning in the collied night,
> That in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth,
> And ere a man hath power to say,—Behold!
> The jaws of darkness do devour it up;

but in this lightning, the storm-laden air hanging over the state of Verona disburdened itself, and the last transient storm-cloud gave place to the first gleams of enduring brightness.

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

We have placed together the love-plays of Shakespeare in an unbroken series, the end of which, both as regards purport and significance, is formed by Romeo and Juliet. The Merchant of Venice, which does not either in intention or matter belong to this series, the love-affairs it contains having only a subordinate signification, dates the time of its origin previous to that of Romeo and Juliet and the Midsummer-Night's Dream. According to 'Henslowe's Journal,' a Venetian comedy was produced in 1594, and it is possible that this may have been our present play, as at that time the Blackfriars company acted in combination with the company under Henslowe at Newington Butts. The form, the versification, the few doggerel verses, and the alternate rhymes which appear in the play, are less to be regarded as evidences of its age than certain internal tokens which place it somewhat among the earlier plays. The allusions to ancient myths are much more frequent here than in Romeo and Juliet; the greater want of delicacy in the conversation of noble ladies, which we never subsequently find in Shakespeare, may be compared with that which meets us in Love's Labour's Lost and in the Two Gentlemen of Verona. Launcelot appears even in name to be only an offshoot of the Launce in the Two Gentlemen of Verona; the counterpart of Jessica's relation with her father, in the scene of Launcelot's interview with his own, is kept up entirely in the style of the similar scene in the Two Gentlemen of Verona; when he shows the old man the way, we are entirely reminded of the jests in the Latin comedy. All these possess a kindred likeness with the older plays, which is scarcely perceptible in Romeo and Juliet.

The story of the Merchant of Venice is a blending together of the two originally separate narratives of the three caskets and of the dispute regarding the pound of flesh. Both are in the well-

known collection of the Gesta Romanorum; the anecdote of the three caskets is very short and simple, but the inscriptions are almost word for word as we find them in our own play. The narrative most allied to the principal story is to be found in a very rough and fantastic form in the Pecorone of Giovanni Fiorentino, a work of the fourteenth century, printed in 1554. The circumstance, which, according to Shakespeare, took place between the two friends, Bassanio and Antonio, is there imputed to a foster-father and son. The latter wooes a lady of Belmont, who, with Circeian cunning, ensnares her suitors, this one among the rest, and twice takes his vessel from him. The third time he equips his ship with foreign gold, pledging the pound of flesh from his foster-father; this time, wisely warned, he obtains the lady, who also subsequently becomes the judge in the lawsuit. Even the play with the ring, which forms the main substance of the fifth act of our drama, is not lacking here; nothing is altered, but that instead of the magic arts of the lady of Belmont the anecdote of the three caskets is introduced, and the thrice repeated undertaking is resolved into one. It has justly been remarked that there was much skill in this blending together of two equally strange adventures, in order to produce the harmony which is indispensable to artistic illusion. The touch of improbability in both transports the reader more effectively into the world of romance than a single adventure of this kind could have done; the metaphorical character of the will suits that of the lawsuit; the skilful combination of both produces that probability which we draw from the repetition of similar circumstances, even when in the abstract they are utterly strange to us. As far as we know, there were no English translations in Shakespeare's time of the narrative sources of the story. But possibly the subject of the play, with the same blending of two originally separate naratives, may have been prepared in an older play previous to Shakespeare. Gosson, in his 'School of Abuse' (1579), speaks of a piece entitled 'The Jew,' the subject of which exhibited 'the greedinesse of worldly chusers, and the bloody mindes of usurers.' We see, indeed, that this so strikingly agrees with the two combined parts of our play, namely, Shylock and the suitors of Portia, that it is hardly to be doubted that this piece had already handled the same material; so that, in the Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare had another play before him for his use. What assistance this supposed forerunner of the Merchant of

Venice may have afforded we cannot of course know; scarcely the framework in those old tales was available to Shakespeare. From these idle stories, replete as they are with improbabilities, he has formed a play full of the deepest worldly wisdom, which, if we strip off the garb of romance and the colouring of passion, may be regarded more than any other of his works as a mirror reflecting the very reality of common life.

For the understanding of Shakespeare, nothing is perhaps more instructive than occasionally, when circumstances admit of it, to add the explanation of other commentators to our own reflections upon his works, in order that by comparing a series of double expositions we may penetrate more nearly to the meaning of Shakespearian poetry. We shall by this means perceive how very different are the points of view from which these poems may be apprehended, and how various are the opinions which may be advanced upon the same piece, with a certain degree and appearance of justice: thus affording a proof of the richness and many-sidedness of these works. At the same time this will give us occasion to examine ourselves, and to discover whether we retain the pure susceptibility and unbiassed mind required for the comprehension of the writings of our master, so that we may as far as possible perceive the one idea which moved the poet himself in each of his creations, and that we may distinguish this one idea from the many which each of the more important of those creations is capable of suggesting to the versatile minds of our own day. In this comparison of interpretation, we shall, besides, have repeatedly occasion to show where the key to Shakespeare's works is really to be found, and what are the kind of leading ideas on which he has formed his plays.

Ulrici has justly remarked that the connecting threads in this play lie very much hidden, owing to the different circumstances contained in it. The poet has here not given himself the trouble, as in Romeo and Juliet, to insinuate his design by express explanation. Ulrici (and Röscher also) perceived the fundamental idea of the Merchant of Venice in the sentence, 'summum jus summa injuria.' With ability and ingenuity he has referred the separate parts to this one central point. The lawsuit in which Shylock enforces the letter of justice, and is himself avengingly struck by the letter of justice, is thus placed in the true centre of the piece. The arbitrariness of the will, in which Portia's father appears to assert the utmost

severity of his paternal right, and which, as Portia herself laments, 'puts bars between the owners and their rights,' connects the second element of the piece in one idea with the principal part. Jessica's escape from her father forms the contrast to this; in the one, right is wrong, in the other, wrong is right. The intricacy of right and wrong appears at its height in the quarrel of the lovers in the last act. Even Launcelot's reflections on the right and wrong of his running away, and his blame of Jessica in the fourth act, concur with this point of view. We are thus led to understand the stress which Portia, in her speech to Shylock, lays upon mercy: not severe right, but tempered equity alone can hold society together.

But when we glance at the external structure of the piece, the essential characters do not all stand in relation to this idea—a requirement which we find fulfilled in all the maturer works of our poet. Bassanio, who is really the link uniting Antonio and Portia, the principal actors in the two separate incidents, has nothing to do with this idea. Just as little are the friends and parasites of Antonio, and the suitors of Portia, connected with it. Moreover, Portia's father is called 'a virtuous and holy man,' who has left behind him the order concerning the caskets out of kindness, in a sort of 'inspiration,' but in no wise in a severe employment of paternal power. But even setting aside these reasons, which we derive from the attempt to connect the acting characters with the fundamental idea of the piece, we feel that such a maxim as the above can only be the result of a forced interpretation of any of the Shakespearian plays. We only arrive at such maxims and explanations when we consider the story and the plot in this or other plays as the central point for consideration. Ulrici does this: he calls this piece a comedy of intrigue, as he has also even more unsuitably designated Cymbeline, a play that must be classed with those most magnificent works of the poet, which like Lear confine within the narrow scope of a drama almost the richness of an epos. In Ulrici's opinion the story is the all-important point; in ours the story grows out of the peculiar nature of the characters. We do not, like him, distinguish the dramatic styles, and we believe that Shakespeare himself did not thus distinguish them, for to him the form arose naturally out of the material in obedience to internal laws. Shylock is connected in the intricacies of the action with Antonio by means of Bassanio; these men, and their characters and motives, exist in the poet's mind

before the plot is designed which results from their co-operation. Granted that the subject was transmitted to the poet, and that here, as in All's Well that Ends Well, he held himself conscientiously bound to the strangest of all materials; still that which most distinguishes him and his poetry, that in which he maintains his freest action, that from which he designs the structure of his pieces, and even creates the given subject anew, is ever the characters themselves and the motives of their actions. In these the poet is ever himself, ever great, ever ingenious and original; the story of his plays is for the most part borrowed; it is often strange, without probability, and in itself of no value. Unconcerned, he allows it to remain as a poetic symbol for every analogous circumstance which might be possible in reality; he investigates human nature, he discovers the qualities and passions which probably would be capable of committing such an action, and he then presents to view, in a simple picture, the springs of these passions and of these dispositions of mind and character, though he never deduces them from an abstract maxim like Ulrici's. What we may call the leading idea, the pervading soul, in Shakespeare's plays is ever expressed plainly and simply in a single relation, in a single passion or form of character. The nature and property of love and jealousy, the soap-bubbles produced by the thirst for glory, and irresolution avoiding its task, these are the images and the ideas which Romeo and Othello, Love's Labour's Lost, and Hamlet present to us; and in each of these plays we perceive the poet's purpose without aphorism and reflection, rarely from the action and story considered by itself, but ever from a closer investigation of the motives of the actors themselves. It is just this which Shakespeare himself in Hamlet demanded from the art: that it should hold the mirror up to nature, that it should give a representation of life, of men, and of their powers of action, thus obtaining a moral influence, but with the purest poetic means, namely, by image, by lively representation, and by imaginative skill. To perceive and to know the virtues and crimes of men, to reflect them as in a mirror, and to exhibit them in their sources, their nature, their workings, and their results, and this in such a way as to exclude chance and to banish arbitrary fate, which can have no place in a well-ordered world, such is the task which Shakespeare has imposed upon the poet and upon himself.

We will now say what reflections the Merchant of Venice

has excited in our own mind. We have already mentioned how Gosson designated the moral of a piece, the purport of which we have supposed the same as that of the Merchant of Venice: it represented, he says, 'the greedinesse of worldly chusers and the bloody mindes of usurers.' In Shakespeare's time the idea and purpose of a stage piece were always conceived in this kind of simple and practically moral manner. In order, therefore, to adhere to the spirit of the time, we ought also always similarly to designate the fundamental idea of the plays of that age, and in doing this we ought not even to avoid the risk of appearing trivial. We may say after our own fashion, in a more abstract and pretentious form, that the intention of the poet in the Merchant of Venice was to depict the relation of man to property. However commonplace this may appear, the more worthy of admiration is that which Shakespeare, with extraordinary, profound, and poetic power, has accomplished in his embodiment of the subject.

If we look back to the plays which we have previously perused, and still more when we shall have gone through the rest of the works belonging to this period, and at its close shall revert to Shakespeare's life, we shall see our poet, throughout the whole space of time and in almost all the works which proceeded from him, struggling as it were with one great idea, which at length exhibits a similar conflict within himself, and in which his nobler spiritual nature battles with and overcomes the lower world without: one indeed of the most remarkable dramas in the inner life of a man, however fragmentary may be the touches with which we must delineate it. We have before intimated that in the historical plays, which almost wholly belong to this period, we should point out the poet as occupied with this one fundamental idea:—in the wide sphere of public life, in the history of states and princes, no less than in private life, all his reflections lead to this, that merit, deeds, character, education, inner worth, and greatness, surpass ancestral right, rank, and outward pretentions. In the plays which we have last gone through the poet has throughout shown himself opposed to all unreality; to false, fickle friendship and love; to vain parade of learning or of mental heroism or wit; to all seeming merit, and assumption of ancestry and nobility; to a show of valour and bullying, and even to the feigned behaviour of the man who is sinking under the weight of a noble passion. We must here draw attention to a characteristic, which, as much

as any in Shakespeare's works, assists us in perceiving the personal nature of the poet. To no subject does Shakespeare so often revert in aphorisms and in satirical invectives with such violent bitterness as to the custom, at that time gaining ground, of wearing false hair and rouge, and in this manner of affecting youthful ornament and beauty upon head and face. Nothing expresses more simply than this touch the profound abhorrence which Shakespeare, with his true and unfeigned nature, bore towards all physical and moral tinsel and varnish in man. From all this we see that the poet's mind and thoughts early aspired from the outward to the inward being, that they penetrated the marrow and kernel of a true and worthy existence, and in this highest sense, as his mental vision widened, he conceived his poetic writings, matured them, and brought them forth.

In the present play the idea so dominant in the poet's mind has been grasped in its very centre. The god of the world, the image of show, the symbol of all external things, is money. and it is so called by Shakespeare, and in all proverbs. To examine the relation of man to property or to money is to place his intrinsic value on the finest scale, and to separate that which belongs to the unessential, to 'outward shows,' from that which in its inward nature relates to a higher destiny. As attributes of show, gold and silver, misleading and testing the chooser, are taken as the material of Portia's caskets, and Bassanio's comments on the caskets mark the true meaning of the piece:—

> So may the outward shows be least themselves;
> The world is still deceived with ornament.
> In law, what plea so tainted and corrupt
> But, being season'd with a gracious voice,
> Obscures the show of evil? In religion,
> What damned error, but some sober brow
> Will bless it and approve it with a text,
> Hiding the grossness with fair ornament?
> There is no vice so simple but assumes
> Some mark of virtue on its outward parts:
> How many cowards assume but valour's excrement,
> To render them redoubted! Look on beauty,
> And you shall see 'tis purchased by the weight;
> So are those crisped snaky golden locks,
> Which make such wanton gambols with the wind,
> Upon supposed fairness, often known
> To be the dowry of a second head,
> The scull that bred them, in the sepulchre.
> Thus ornament is but the guiled shore

> To a most dangerous sea; the beauteous scarf
> Veiling an Indian beauty; in a word,
> The seeming truth which cunning times put on
> To entrap the wisest.

The chooser therefore turns away from the gold and silver, as from the current and received image of that precarious show, and turns to the lead, 'which rather threatenest, than doth promise aught.' And so, not his relation alone, but the relation of a number of beings to gold, this perishable and false good, is depicted in our play. A number of characters and circumstances show how the possession produces in men barbarity and cruelty, hatred and obduracy, anxiety and indifference, spleen and fickleness; and again how it calls forth the highest virtues and qualities, and, by testing, confirms them. But essential prominence is given to the relation of the outward possession, to an inclination of an entirely inward character, namely, to friendship. This is indeed inserted by the poet in the original story; it is, however, not arbitrarily interwoven with it, but is developed according to its inmost nature from the materials given. For the question of man's relation to property is ever at the same time a question of his relation to man, as it cannot be imagined apart from man. The miser, who seeks to deprive others of possession and to seize upon it himself, will hate and will be hated. The spendthrift, who gives and bestows, loves and will be loved. The relation of both to possession, their riches or their poverty, will, as it changes, also change their relation to their fellow-men. For this reason the old story of Timon, handled by our poet in its profoundest sense, is at once a history of prodigality and a history of false friendship. And thus Shakespeare, in the poem before us, has shown a genuine affinity between the pictures he exhibits of avarice and prodigality, of hard usury and inconsiderate extravagance, so that the play may just as well be called a song of true friendship. The most unselfish spiritual affection is placed in contrast to the most selfish worldly one, the most essential truth to unessential show. For even sexual love, in its purest and deepest form, through the addition of sensual enjoyment, is not in the same measure free from selfishness as friendship is, which, as an inclination of the soul, is wholly based upon the absence of all egotism and self-love; its purity and elevation is tested by nothing so truly as by the

exact opposite, namely, by possession, which excites most powerfully the selfishness and self-interest of men.

We shall now see how the apparently disparate circumstances of our play work wonderfully one into the other, and with what wisdom the principal characters are arranged with respect to each other.

In the centre of the actors in the play, in a rather passive position, stands Antonio, the princely merchant, of enviable and immense possessions, a Timon and Shylock in riches, but with a noble nature elevated far above the effects which wealth produced in these men. Placed between the generous giver and the miser, between the spendthrift and the usurer, between Bassanio and Shylock, between friend and foe, he is not even remotely tempted by the vices into which these have fallen; there is not the slightest trace to be discovered in him of that care for his wealth imputed to him by Salanio and Salarino, who in its possession would be its slaves. But his great riches have inflicted upon him another evil, the malady of the rich, who have never been agitated and tried by anything, and have never experienced the pressure of the world. He has the spleen, he is melancholy; a sadness has seized him, the source of which no one knows; he has a presentiment of some danger, such as Shakespeare always imparts to all sensitive, susceptible natures. In this spleen, like all hypochondriacs, he takes delight in cheerful society; he is surrounded by a number of parasites and flatterers, among whom there is one nobler character, Bassanio, with whom alone a deeper impulse of friendship connects him. He is affable, mild, and generous to all, without knowing their tricks and without sharing their mirth; the loquacious versatility and humour of a Gratiano is indifferent to him; his pleasure in their intercourse is passive, according to his universal apathy. His nature is quiet and is with difficulty affected; when his property and its management leave him without anxiety, he utters a 'fie, fie,' over the supposition that he is in love; touched by no fault, but moved also by no virtue, he appears passionless, and almost an automaton. The position which the poet has given him in the midst of the more active characters of the piece is an especially happy one; for were he of less negative greatness he would throw all others into deep shadow; we should feel too painful and exciting a sympathy in his subsequent danger. Yet he is not allowed, for this reason, to appear quite feelingless. For in one point he shows that he

shared the choler and natural feelings of others. When brought into contact with the usurer, the Jew Shylock, we see him in a state of agitation, partly arising from moral and business principles, partly from intolerance and from national religious aversion. This sense of honour in the merchant against the money-changer and usurer urges him to those glaring outbursts of hatred, when he rates Shylock in the Rialto about his 'usances,' calls him a dog, 'foots' him, and spits upon his beard. For this he receives a lesson for life in his lawsuit with the Jew, whom, with his apathetic negligence, he allows to get the advantage over him. His life is placed in danger, and the apparently insensible man is suddenly drawn closer to us; he is suffering, so that high and low intercede for him; he himself petitions Shylock; his situation weakens him; the experience is not lost upon him; it is a crisis, it is the creation of a new life for him; finally, when he is lord and master over Shylock, he no longer calls up his old hatred against him, and, aroused from his apathy, he finds henceforth in Bassanio's happiness and tried friendship the source of a renovated and ennobled existence.

Unacquainted with this friend of Bassanio's, there lives at Belmont his beloved Portia, the contrast to Antonio, a character upon whom Shakespeare has not hesitated to heap all the active qualities of which he has deprived Antonio; for in the womanly being kept modestly in the background, these qualities are not likely to appear so overwhelmingly prominent as we felt that they would have been if united in the man, whom they would have raised too far above the other characters of the piece. Nevertheless, Portia is the most important figure in our drama, and she forms even its true central point; as for her sake, without her fault or knowledge, the knot is entangled, and through her and by means of her conscious effort it is also loosened. She is just as royally rich as Antonio, and as he is encompassed with parasites, so is she by suitors from all lands. She too, like Antonio, and still more than he, is wholly free from every disturbing influence of her possessions upon her inner being. She carries out her father's will in order to secure herself from a husband who might purchase her beauty by the weight. Without this will she would of herself have acted similarly; wooed by princely suitors she loves Bassanio, whom she knew to be utterly poor. She too, like Antonio, is melancholy, but not from spleen, not from apathy, not without cause, not from

the ennui of riches, but from passion alone, from her love for Bassanio, from care for the doubtful issue of that choice which threatens to surrender her love to chance. A thoroughly superior nature, she stands above Antonio and Bassanio as Helena does above Bertram, higher than Rosaline is raised above Biron and Juliet above Romeo; it seems that Shakespeare at that time created and endowed his female characters in the conviction that the woman was fashioned out of better material than the man. On account of the purity of her nature she is compared to the image of a saint, on account of the strength of her will to Brutus' Portia; Jessica speaks of her as without 'her fellow' in the world, giving to her husband 'the joys of heaven here on earth.' The most beautiful and the most contradictory qualities, manly determination and womanly tenderness, are blended together in her. She is musical and energetic, playful and serious; she is at once cheerful and devout, not devout before but after action; her companion, Nerissa, is of the same stamp; she possesses a similar nature, full of raillery and playfulness, but of vigorous power, and she is so much attached to Portia that she only promises her hand to Gratiano in case Bassanio's choice has a successful issue. To this man of her heart Portia represents herself as a rough jewel, although she is far superior to him; she gives herself to him with the most womanly modesty, although she is capable rather of guiding him. She is superior to all circumstances, that is her highest praise; she would have accommodated herself to any husband, and for this reason her father may have felt himself justified in prescribing the lottery; he could do so with the most implicit confidence; she knows the contents of the caskets, but she betrays it not. She has already sent from her eyes 'speechless messages' to Bassanio, and now she would gladly entertain him some months before he chooses, that she may at least secure a short possession; but no hint from her facilitates his choice. And yet she has to struggle with the warm feeling which longs to transgress the will: it is a temptation to her, but she resists it with honour and resolution. Yet, quick in judgment, skilled in the knowledge of men, and firm in her demeanour, she knows how to frighten away, by her behaviour, the utterly worthless lovers;[1] so superior is she in all this, that her subsequent

[1] Portia's humorous review of them must have rested on an inclination common at the time to ridicule in this manner the characters of foreign nations, since Sully puts a similar review in the mouth of his Henry IV.

appearance as judge is perfectly conceivable. Famous actresses, such as Mrs. Clive in Garrick's time, have used this judgment-scene as a burlesque to laugh at—a part in which the highest pathos is at work, and an exalted character is pursuing the most pure and sacred object.

Between Portia and Antonio stands Bassanio, the friend of the one, the lover of the other; he appears between the two boundlessly rich persons as a man utterly poor, ruined in his circumstances, inconsiderate, and extravagant at the expense of his friend. He seems to belong thoroughly to the parasitical class of Antonio's friends. In disposition he is more inclined to the merry Gratiano than to Antonio's severe gravity; he appears on the stage with the question 'When shall we laugh?' and he joins with his frivolous companions in all cheerful and careless folly. On this occasion he is borrowing once more three thousand ducats, in order to make a strange Argonautic expedition to the 'Golden Fleece,' staking them on a blind adventure, the doubtful wooing of a rich heiress. His friend breaks his habit of never borrowing on credit, he enters into an agreement with the Jew upon the bloody condition, and the adventurer accepts the loan with the sacrifice. Before he sets forth, on the very same day and evening, he purchases fine livery for his servants with this money, and gives a merry feast as a farewell, during which the daughter of the invited Jew is to be carried off by one of the free-thinking fellows. Does not the whole conduct appear as if he were only the seeming friend of this rich man for the sake of borrowing his money, and only the seeming lover of this rich lady for the sake of paying his debts with her fortune?

But this quiet Antonio seemed to know the man thus apparently bad to be of better nature. He knew him indeed as somewhat too extravagant, but not incurably so, as one who was ready and able also to restrict himself. He knew him as one who stood 'within the eye of honour,' and he lent to him without a doubt of his integrity. His confidence was unlimited, and he blames him rather that he should 'make question of his uttermost,' than 'if he had made waste of all he has.' In his melancholy, it is this man alone who chains him to the world; their friendship needs no brilliant words, it is unfeignedly genuine. His eyes, full of tears at parting, tell Bassanio what he is worth to Antonio; it is the very acceptance of the loan which satisfies Antonio's confidence. The downright and regardless Gratiano, whose jests, faultless to his friend, are an

offence to the world, is seriously enjoined by him as to behaviour and habits in his courting expedition to the noble Portia, and the parting supper is made use of for the committal of a virtuous sin, in withdrawing the loveliest of daughters from the most unnatural father. When he comes to Portia, he does not accede to her tender womanly proposal that he should safely enjoy two months' intercourse with her; he will not 'live upon the rack,' and he insists with manly resolution upon the decision. His choice, and the very motives of his choice, exhibit him as the man not of show, but of genuine nature; his significant speech upon this fundamental theme of the piece stands as the true centre of the play. The scene of his choice, accompanied by music and followed by Portia's anxious glances and torturing agony, must be seen to be enjoyed; the amiability and sincerity of both are here portrayed in their greatest beauty. When he perceives the portrait, he divines indeed his happiness, but he ventures not yet to hope it, and in spite of his agitation he seems absorbed only with the work of art; when the scroll announces to him his triumph (a flourish of instruments will set forth his words in their true light), he nevertheless pauses to obtain confirmation from the original; and she, who had before followed tremblingly every movement, recovers her composure at the happy decision, and in language full of womanly devotion recalls the man to himself, dazzled as he is by his good fortune.

Bassanio's choice is crowned by success, or, we may more justly say, his wise consideration of the father's object and of the mysterious problem meets with its deserved reward. But his fair doctrine of show is to be tested immediately, whether it be really deed and truth. His adventurous expedition has succeeded through his friend's assistance and loan. But at the same moment in which he is at the climax of his happiness, his friend is at the climax of misfortune and in the utmost danger of his life, and this from the very assistance and loan which have helped Bassanio to his success. The horror of the intelligence concerning Antonio occurs at the very prime of his betrothal happiness. The genuine character of the friend now shows itself. The intelligence disturbs his whole nature. On his wedding-day—Portia herself permits not that they should be married first—he leaves her in order to save his friend, to pay thrice the money borrowed, in the hope of being able to avert the course of the law in this case of necessity. But Portia proves even here her superior nature. She sees more keenly

what an inevitable snare the inhuman Jew has dug for Antonio; she adopts the surest course of saving him by right and law itself; she devises at the same time a plan for testing the man of her love. Even with all this, the idea of the design of the whole piece concurs most closely. Her own choice had been denied her by her father's arrangement; her delight in Bassanio rested not on a long acquaintance; the alliance made by chance appears to her to acquire its true consecration and security by one solemn trial; she will test him and his friend, she will test him by his friendship. She conceives the friendship of her husband, as the betrothed so readily do, in the most ideal manner; Lorenzo praises her noble 'conceit of amity' even before he knows what she has done; she wishes to convince herself of the nature of this friendship, in order that she may conclude from it the nature of Bassanio's love. She saves her husband from despair, and his friend from death, at the same moment that amid their torments she is observing their value. In this catastrophe Antonio has to atone for all the sin he has committed against Shylock through sternness, and Bassanio for all that of which he was guilty through frivolity, extravagance, and participation in the offences against the Jew: the best part of both is exhibited through their sufferings in their love for each other, and Antonio's words, the seal of this friendship, must have penetrated deeply into Portia's heart. But with equally great agitation she hears the words of Bassanio, that he would sacrifice his wife, his latest happiness, to avert the misfortune which he had caused. Such an avowal must enchant her: this was indeed standing the fiery test. Whilst she turns the words into a jest, she has to overcome the deepest emotion; with those words the sin is forgiven of which Bassanio was guilty. By his readiness for such a sacrifice he deserves the friend, whom he had exposed to death through the wooing of his wife, and the means which Antonio had given him of pressing his suit; and by it also he shows that he deserves his wife, who could not be called happily won by a fortunate chance which had proved at the same time the evil destiny of his friend. This trial of Bassanio is carried on by Portia in the last act of the play. It has always been said of this act that it was added for the satisfaction of an æsthetic necessity, in order to efface the painful impression of the judgment scene; but it is equally required to satisfy the moral interest of the play by a last proof of the genuineness of this friendship. The helpful judge de-

mands from Bassanio, as a reward, the ring which his wife had forbidden him to give away. Antonio himself begs him to give the ring, and places his love in the scale to 'be valued 'gainst his wife's commandment;' love and friendship come into a final collision, amusing to the spectator, but most serious to those tested by it: friendship must carry the day, if love is to be genuine. He makes his wife secondary to his friend, because he had obtained his wife only by means of his friend. And he thus proves in an emergency, which placed a painful choice before him, that he was in earnest in those words, that he would sacrifice his wife to his friend in order that his friend might not fall a sacrifice to his wife. He proves in this severe Brutus-like sentence against that which was his dearest treasure that he is worthy of his Portia.

Such are the various characteristics of the noblest circumstances, relations, and intricacies between man and man, between worth and possession. Shylock is the contrast, which we hardly need explain; although, indeed, in this degenerated age of art and morals, lowness and madness have gone so far as to make a martyr on the stage out of this outcast of humanity. The poet has, it is true, given to this character, in order that he may not sink quite below our interest, a perception of his pariah-condition, and has imputed his outbursts of hatred against Christians and aristocrats partly to genuine grounds of annoyance. Moreover, in his delineation of the usurer he has not been biassed by the hatred of the Christians of that time against all that was Jewish, otherwise he would not have imparted to Jessica her lovely character. But of the emancipation of the Jew he knew indeed nothing, and least of all of the emancipation of this Jew, whom Burbage in Shakespeare's time acted in a character of frightful exterior, with long nose and red hair, and whose inward deformity and hardened nature were far less the result of religious bigotry than of the most terrible of all fanaticism, that of avarice and usury. He hates indeed the Christians as Christians, and therefore Antonio who has mistreated him; but he hates him far more because by disinterestedness, by what he calls 'low simplicity,' he destroys his business, because he lends out money gratis, brings down the rate of usance, and has lost him half a million. Riches have made him the greatest contrast to that which they have rendered Antonio, who throughout appears indifferent, incautious, careless, and generous. Shylock on the other hand

is meanly careful, cautiously circumspect, and systematically quiet, ever shufflingly occupied as a genuine son of his race, not disdaining the most contemptible means nor the most contemptible object, speculating in the gaining of a penny, and looking so far into the future and into small results that he sends the greedy Launcelot into Bassanio's service, and against his principle eats at night at Bassanio's house, only for the sake of feeding upon the prodigal Christian. This trait is given to him by the poet in a truly masterly manner, in order subsequently to explain the barbarous condition on which he lends Antonio that fatal sum. Shakespeare after his habit has done the utmost to give probability to this most improbable degree of cruelty, which, according to Bacon, appears in itself a fabulous tragic fiction to every honest mind. Antonio has mistreated him; at the moment of the loan he was as like to mistreat him again; he challenges him to lend it as to an enemy; he almost suggests to him the idea, which the Jew places, as if jestingly, as a condition of the loan; and he, the man railed at for usury, is ready generously to grant it without interest to the man who never borrowed upon advantage. The same crafty speculation and reckoning, attended at all events with one advantage, underlie this proposal; in one case it has the show of disinterestedness, in the other it promises opportunity for a fearful revenge. If the Jew really had only partially trifled with the idea of such a revenge, the poet does everything to make the jest fearfully earnest. Money had effaced everything human from the heart of this man, he knows nothing of religion and moral law but when he quotes the Bible in justification of his usury; he knows of no mercy but that to which he may be compelled; there is no justice and mercy in his heart nor any of the love of kindred. His daughter is carried away from him; he is furious, not because he is robbed of her, but because she has robbed him in her flight; he would see his daughter dead at his feet, provided that the jewels and gems were in her ears; he would see her 'hearsed' before him, provided the ducats were in her coffin. He regrets the money employed in her pursuit; when he hears of her extravagance, the irretrievable loss of his ducats occasions fresh rage. In this condition he pants for revenge against Antonio even before there is any prospect of it, against the man who by long mortifications had stirred up rage and hatred in the bosom of the Jew, and with whose removal his usury

would be without an adversary. Obduracy and callousness continue to progress in him, until at the pitch of his wickedness he falls into the pit he had dug; and then, according to the notions of the age, he learns from the conduct of Antonio and of the Duke that mercy exercised in a Christian spirit produces other actions than those suggested by the unmerciful god of the world, who had imposed upon him its laws alone. This awful picture of the effects of a thirst for possession, however strongly it is exhibited, will not appear as a caricature to him who has met with similar instances in the actual world, in the histories of gamblers and misers.

The interpretation which we have thus given to the Merchant of Venice perfectly coincides with all the characters of the play, and even with the subordinate ones. The self-interested suitors of Portia, corrupted by glitter and show, choose amiss. The parasitical companions of Antonio forsake him with his fortune; those loquacious acquaintances, though foreboding his danger before he does, do not even write to Bassanio. Again, Lorenzo and Jessica—an extravagant, giddy couple, free from restraint—squander their pilfered gold in Genoa, and give it away for monkeys, and reach Belmont like famished people. The little Jessica is placed no higher by the poet than she could be; brought up, as she was, without a mother, in the society of Shylock and Launcelot, with a mind entirely child-like, naïve, true, and spotless; and if we may trust Lorenzo's words and her sure perception of the greatness of Portia, with a capacity for true wisdom. Thus as she is, she is a thoroughly modest child, whom on the threshold of moral consciousness unnatural circumstances have driven to feel ashamed of her father, and to fly from him concealed in boy's clothes—a dress painful to her easily excited modesty. Thus delicately feminine, she has no scruples of conscience in stealing the ducats and the jewels of her father. A new relation to possession is exhibited in this nature: it is that of the inexperienced child, totally unacquainted with the value of money, who innocently throws it away in trifles, having learnt in her paternal home neither domestic habits nor economy. In this Lorenzo is only too congenial with her, although he would have her believe that he was as a man what Portia is as a woman; Antonio, who knows them better, takes both under his guardianship, and manages their inheritance for them. Launcelot also bears a relation to the common idea of the piece. Greedy and rough

as he is, he also is inclined to lack economy; thus knowing Bassanio, and aware that he would live better in the house of the Jew, out of a sense of honour he prefers to go to the generous poor man than remain with the rich miser. Otherwise the scene with his father, as we have already pointed out, is exhibited in parodic contrast to Jessica's relation to hers. The emphasis of the scene lies in the words that the son of a father must ever come to light, that childlike feeling can never be renounced, not even by so coarse and blunt a fellow as this. How much more should this be the case with a being so ethereal as Jessica! But that it is not so is the strongest shadow thrown by the poet upon Shylock; he has not designed by it to cast any upon Jessica. 'She is damn'd,' says Shylock. 'That's certain, if the devil may be her judge,' answers Salarino.

II. HISTORICAL PLAYS.

We have gone through the group of love-plays belonging to the second period of Shakespeare's dramatic poetry, and we turn now to the group of historical plays, which are arranged according to time in the following manner:—Richard III., which is closely linked by its subject with the three parts of Henry VI., already discussed, stands also as regards time as the first of Shakespeare's independent histories. The composition of the latter parts of Henry VI. may be assigned a date not long prior to 1592; Collier places Richard III. in 1593, and subsequent editors assume that it was written somewhat later, not long before the first publication of the piece in 1597. In opposition to the tetralogy thus completed of the rise and fall of the house of York, Shakespeare next prepared the tetralogy of the rise of the House of Lancaster; Richard II., printed likewise in 1597, must have been written between Richard III. and Henry IV., certainly not long after the first of these plays; the two parts of Henry IV. were written between 1597–98, and Henry V. in 1597. King John is distinct from this series, both in subject and purport; as regards the time of its origin, it belongs to this second period of the poet's writings (before 1598). Henry VIII. alone belongs to the third period, and for this and other reasons it will be discussed in another place.

The poet here passes into a distinctly opposite sphere. Hitherto we have seen him in the range of private life and of personal existence, insinuating himself into the internal history of single individuals, or occupied with the productions of their brain. Here, in this series of historical plays, he enters the wide outward sphere of public life; he is occupied with states and histories, and is stirred by thoughts political and national, and not merely by moral ideas and psychological truths. And in this field of action and noble ambition the poet shows himself no less at ease than in the regions of man's internal life of

thought and feeling. Fettered by historical tradition, and by the sober reality of the subject, he is as a poet no less great than in the fantastic creations of the comedies which are his own invention. We feel the boundless scope which this twofold diffusion of the mind of Shakespeare gave to his poetry; we shall only endeavour to illustrate by a single comparison, easily understood by us Germans, the superiority of human gifts which this two-sided nature manifests. It was Goethe's repeated complaint that he lacked the great historical and political life in which Shakespeare moved, and that great market of popular intercourse, which might have accustomed him early to a comprehensive historical survey; and we cannot but acknowledge that from this want his poetic genius, however great in our esteem, became contracted and stunted, and remained below the measure of that which, under other circumstances, it would have accomplished and effected. That which Shakespeare united in himself was divided between our two dramatists; the great historical life of outward action appears in the historical dramas of Schiller, to whom the inner nature of man was not revealed with such rich and pure experiences as to Goethe; and on the other hand the inner life of the individual soul is portrayed in Goethe, to whom, on the contrary, history was strange and unfamiliar. By this division the life of thought and feeling, and the world of sentiments and ideas, contained in the poems of the one, is generally deprived of the great background of national or political life upon which Shakespeare almost always placed his pictures of private and individual life; and in the historical plays of the other we miss the psychological many-sidedness and the fulness of individual characterisation which is never wanting in Shakespeare's histories. We possess a whole in two halves, which is far from being the same as possessing the whole as a whole. For on this very account we have split into parties under two writers, while England belongs entirely and undividedly to one; in the passion of this party feeling we become infatuated in favour of the one, whilst the nature and being of both combined alone constitutes the image of a perfect humanity, worthy of our devoted admiration.

If we consider the series of the historical dramas in themselves, and investigate their merits as belonging to a different style of dramatic writing, the first thing which strikes us is their national and political importance. The English possess

in this group of plays, as Schlegel said, a great dramatic epopee with which no other nation has aught to compare. Almost all historical plays—even the non-Shakespeare ones included, the material for which is taken from English history—were created by the English stage in not much more than a single decade, in the happiest period of the happy age of Elizabeth, when the whole English people were in a state of rare national elevation. Previous to her reign the national feeling of England had increased for the first time, and its knightly fame, in an age when nations were still unacquainted with each other, had penetrated throughout all Europe in the time of Edward III. and Henry V., when the small island people had victoriously stood in the midst of France. Subsequently its power and its self-reliance had utterly declined through internal party strife and the loss of former conquests, and had only slowly revived since Henry VII. It was not until Elizabeth's time that English history again assumed an aspect which reminded the masses of the people of their fatherland, and again offered food for national feeling. The honoured queen was mistress over the arms and the intrigues of her enemies—France, the Pope, and Spain—and fortune wonderfully favoured her efforts; the English people learned to feel themselves on the superior ground of Protestantism compared to the dark religion of Spain; the English maritime power was at that time first really established, and it exulted at the outset in the most promising victories. If we trace the effects of these public political circumstances upon the literature of England, its historical dramas are the first thing that occur to us. In Shakespeare's King John, and in the older drama upon which it rests, how completely Protestant self-reliance is exhibited, and how firmly and securely in Henry VIII. are those influences extolled which procured the first entrance of the true worship of God in England. How eloquently in *Richard II.*, and in Henry V. and VI., not only does the patriotic spirit of the poet speak, but also the self-appreciation of a people who have again learned to know themselves in the happy sequence of events. How the political heart throbs throughout them, how repeatedly in Shakespeare is that Themistocles' counsel advanced, which enjoins on England to place all her power and confidence on her coast and her vessels, a counsel which has been repeated numberless times by orators in Parliament, with Shakespearian quotations. The whole age influenced the crea-

tion and the spirit of these historical plays, and these again had a corresponding influence upon the patriotic spirit of the people. It is still the chief design of these works to remind the English people of the earlier period of their political greatness, and to bring again before them their Edwards, their Henrys, their Talbots, and the terrors of the French. It is, however, obvious in itself of what consequence this must have been in an age when the self-forgetfulness of nations was general, and when history was but little read. A national history, not to be read but to be looked at—now galling by the representation of shameful discords and defeats, now raising and animating by the description of great deeds of old—must have been indeed a possession at that time for an imaginative rising people, when even at the present day these plays have preserved the same signification, and when statesmen like Marlborough and Chatham acknowledge of themselves that Shakespeare was the first source of their knowledge of English history. 'What English blood,' exclaims Thomas Heywood in his 'Apology for Actors' (1612), 'seeing the person of any bold Englishman presented in our national histories, and doth not hug his fame and cherish his valour, pursuing him in his enterprise with his best wishes, as if the personator were the man personated? What coward, to see his countryman valiant, would not be ashamed of his own cowardice? What English prince, should he behold Henry V., or the portraiture of that famous Edward III., foraging France, taking so great a king captive in his own country, would not be suddenly inflamed with so royal a spectacle?' 'Where is the man,' he writes in another passage, 'where is the man of that weak capacity that cannot discourse of any notable thing recorded even from William the Conqueror, nay, from the landing of Brutus until this day? For the historical plays teach history to those who cannot read it in the Chronicles; these plays are written with this aim, to teach subjects obedience, to represent the untimely ends of such as have moved insurrections, and the flourishing estate of such as prove themselves faithful and keep clear of traitorous stratagems.'

This common political and patriotic significance of these plays is far greater than their historical value in itself. W. Schlegel went so far as to say that 'in Shakespeare's histories the leading features of events were so faithfully conceived, their causes and even their secret motives so clearly penetrated, that the truth of history might be learned from them.' This is in

no wise the case, and this indeed for one reason. The exact features of history, and the true motives of actions, are to be learned thoroughly only from the most conscientious comparison and examination of all possible contemporaneous sources. But Shakespeare was far from taking upon himself this business of the historian, and he has acted wisely. He has essentially followed only one single authority, namely, Holinshed's 'Chronicle,' which appeared in 1577 in two folio volumes, and in an enlarged edition in 1586–87. How far he made use of this authority, and of few other historical sources, how far he adhered to it or departed from it, has been pointed out by Courtenay in his 'Commentaries on the Historical Plays of Shakespeare' (1840); and he comes to the conclusion that the historical value of these plays must not be too highly estimated, a conclusion which is not derogatory to the poet, but much rather invests him with greater honour. Shakespeare has had but one law in using each and all his sources, a law which he applied equally to the driest historical chronicle as to the most fantastic novel—he sought after nature and inner truth; of this he took possession as his property wherever he found it, and the opposite he rejected, whatever the authority that proffered it to him. He found in Plutarch historical traits and motives portrayed in the simple nature of antiquity, traits unconditionally agreeable to his human mode of reflection, and he transcribed them intact with remarkable self-denial in his Roman plays; on the other hand, he met with a crude circumstance, apart from all motive, in a fragmentary chronicle of Prince Hamlet, and from it, with self-inventive power, he formed that profound poem of actions and motives which must entirely be regarded as his property. Occupying a middle position between these two extremes of availability, he found historical annals in Holinshed intermixed with uncertain legends and myths, and he observed towards this chronicle throughout the same conduct, modifying, according to the nature of the sources put before him, the freedom and constraint with which he used them. He brought together a series of facts which displayed a unity of action, he respected the law of inward truth, and not that of chronology, nor of that which may be called outward truth; he referred different actions to the same cause and to the same author, in order that he might avail himself of the riches of history without renouncing unity of action, and he rejected other facts unsuited to this unity. The historian has to beware of trying to guess at the motives

of men from sources like Holinshed's 'Chronicle;' to invent them would be on his side a perfect mistaking of his science and its object; but it is in these secret precincts of history that Shakespeare penetrates boldly with the pragmatic treatment of the poet. Where the historian, bound by an oath to the severest truth in every single statement, can, at the most, only permit us to divine the causes of events and the motives of actions from the bare narration of facts, the poet, who seeks to draw from these facts only a general moral truth, and not one of fact, unites by poetic fiction the actions and the actors in a distinct living relation of cause and effect. The more freely and boldly he does this, as Shakespeare has done in Richard III., the more poetically interesting will his treatment of the history become, but the more will it lose its historical value; the more truly and closely he adheres to reality, as in Richard II., the more will his poetry gain in historical meaning and forfeit in poetic splendour. Shakespeare has even here prescribed no rigid rule once for ever; he allowed himself to be influenced by the nature of the subject, sometimes to the more free, sometimes to the more fettered mode of treatment. Only to one law does he appear to adhere throughout this class: that when designing a poetical organisation of an historical subject, he does not, like Schiller, interweave with it imaginary actions which interfere with the historical connection of events without in any way belonging to the history. In Henry IV., where he went furthest in this respect, he did so in portraying one specially individualised character, such as Henry V., when the ethical aim surpassed the political and historical purpose; but even then these additions do not really interfere with the historical events. It is a common pride on the part of the poets of these historical plays, and a natural peculiarity belonging to this branch of the art, that truth and poetry should go hand in hand. It is more than probable that Henry VIII. bore at first the title so characteristic in this respect—All is True. But this truth is throughout, as we have seen, not to be taken in the prosaic sense of the historian, who seeks it in the historical material in every most minute particular and in its most different aspects; it is only a higher and universal truth, which is gathered by the poet from a series of historical facts, yet which, from the very circumstance that it springs from historical, true, and actual facts, and is supported and upheld by them, acquires, it must be admitted, a double authority, that of poetry and of history combined. The

historical drama, formed of these two component parts, is therefore especially agreeable to the imaginative friend of history and to the realistic friend of poetry.

Considered in this point of view, it has been a strange fancy on the part of our Romanticists, little inclined as they are to realistic poetry, to make a show of wishing to raise these historical plays of Shakespeare above all his other works. A series of these plays is certainly read with as much pleasure as the more independent tragedies of Shakespeare, but perhaps only because a psychologically interesting character, as in Richard III., or non-historical elements, as in Henry IV., form the attraction. Shakespeare has not drawn any severe line of division between history and the independent drama. Many of these plays, owing to the favourable nature of the material or the greatness of the poet, have become tragedies to which every æsthetic rule may be applied, and from which, therefore, a purely artistic enjoyment may be derived. But just where the history is purest, as in Richard III., we have to work our way through heavy matter, which appears to check the flight of the poet as well as our own, and which must be mastered almost by historical study; but when it is mastered, it affords, it must be admitted, a new and increasing enjoyment, such as we seek for in vain in dramas not historical. Before considering Shakespeare's historical plays separately, we will endeavour to premise wherein lies this double quality supplied by the historical matter, which on the one hand adds an intellectual value to the play, and on the other detracts from its æsthetic merit.

With regard first to the latter point, historical truth inspires the poet with such great awe, and he feels himself so constrained by it, that he forfeits at any rate freedom of choice, and, to a certain extent, freedom of treatment. When he sought material among the tales and myths of the Middle Ages, his choice was incomparably more extensive, and he could ever grasp the boldest poetical subject; the motives, moreover, entirely rested with himself. But in the history of his country, a subject like Henry V. had often great weight historically, while poetically it was very empty; causes and motives were here frequently dictated by the events. To invest the historical story with a charm like that of the myth and legend which is poetic in its origin, and with the vigour that marks the exciting catastrophe of a freely invented story, and with the interest that lies in a fascinating plot, is only possible to the poet, when, as in Macbeth, he has

before him an historical myth, that is to say, not a strictly historical matter; it is at best possible only in rare cases, when history strikingly harmonises with poetry. The common course of history presents only the daily detail of actual life, and is destitute of the poetic stimulant. For the perfect drama, the plot of which, according to Aristotle, ought to comprise a fascinating entanglement and its solution, a misunderstanding and its explanation, and in which, in consequence of this entanglement, a sudden change from happiness to misfortune, or from misfortune to happiness, occurs—for such a poetic dramatic creation as this, history very rarely presents a favourable subject. It is not the happy and exciting arrangement of facts, artistically calculated to arouse our sympathy and fear, which in Henry V., in Henry VI., and in Richard II., is the prevailing charm that meets us in poetic form; the course of the action is, on the contrary, even and smooth, its elevating character lies in the greatness of the facts, in the subject more than in the form, and that which is especially attractive is the historical value of the matter. As with the story, so it is with the characters. A series of historical facts might present to the poet a truth worthy of handling, but it might not be linked with characters invested with the alluring splendour of poetry, romance, and heroism. This consideration did not withhold him from writing a poem of the history of Henry V., who is not a character of imposing pathos, nor of tragic effect, but whose life runs rather in the quiet flow of the epos, and displays an ethical nature, the unpretending greatness of which is, however, just as attractive to the thoughtful reader as the highly-excited passion of a Macbeth or an Othello. And as it is with the story and the characters, so is it with the representation. History is frequently only a combination of given facts and their given causes, a dramatised chronicle. The scenes which carry on the political action are destitute of the attraction of poetic diction, and often even of individual and exact characterisation of the actors. If indeed we examine more closely, we shall find that even here the psychological deficiencies of the chronicle have been acutely and wisely supplied, and that the apparently slight work of versifying historical scenes is rich in internal difficulty. Thus the diction of these historical plays is less poetically elevated, and the sober matter of reality fetters the wings of poetic language; but even on this point we can perceive a great advantage conferred on English dramatic poetry by the substantial nature of these plays. It led

the dramatist from rhyme, from the style of conceits and antitheses, and from all the false tinsel of poetry; and it is evident that it was not till Shakespeare was passing and had passed through this school that he acquired his perfect manner of dramatic representation. Gathering all together, it follows from what we have said, and it is felt by all without this analysis, that the poetical charm of these historical plays is inferior to that of Shakespeare's independent dramas, owing to natural causes belonging to the historical material; but that this historical material indicates in the poet another peculiar merit, to which non-historical dramas can lay less claim. It now remains to exhibit this merit more distinctly.

In contrast to the historical play, the free poetic drama may be looked upon, as regards material, as the private domestic play, pervaded by one common moral idea, which in the other is expanded into a political one. The persons of the non-historical drama are morally responsible, as it were, only towards themselves and the small circle near them whom their deeds affect; the historical characters, on the other hand, bear a wider political responsibility, and their actions influence an incomparably wider circle. The conduct of men to whom the management of the state is entrusted concerns whole countries and peoples, and extends its influence far beyond the time which their own life comprehends. If by happy selection or invention, the story of a non-historical drama acquires a boundless *depth* and *intrinsic* value from its delineation of gigantic passions, on the other hand, a happily chosen historical story possesses by nature a boundless *comprehensiveness* and a *wider* value, dependent upon the extent of the background both as regards time and space; that is to say, upon the historical ground itself, which therefore no non-historical drama can present. It is this wide-spread responsibility, this extensive agency of the political actor, which has compelled the acceptance of another moral law and another moral standard for history than that relating to private life. In public life faults are amplified into vices, and crimes again are softened into pardonable faults by the mere measure of greater circumstances. In the historical world we look with less sympathy upon individuals who fall as a sacrifice, when their fall profits the whole community; we look on those who sacrifice them with moderated blame, when they appear as the vehicle for higher aims. On the other hand, weakness of character in private life often appears only a laugh-

able, inoffensive, and even a beneficial fault; but in Henry VI. we have seen that upon the throne it is equal in the scale to the fearful weight of the most frightful crimes, because it disturbs and destroys a whole State. To Brackenburg, in Egmont, Goethe probably wished to give with the name the same disposition of character which Brackenbury bears in Richard III.; this one comparison between the pitiable weak prey to love and the detestable passive instrument of Richard's bloody schemes teaches at a glance what a far more extensive interest is imparted to the same nature by a mere public and political position, and in what a different light it appears in domestic life. This enlarged sphere and this greater ethical standard are obtained by the poet when he enters the historical world, and comprises all the breadth of history within the narrow limits of the drama. Beyond this Shakespeare knew no positive law which suited all cases. His comprehensive eye, therefore, was naturally attracted by these materials, which showed him the work and conduct of man in an entirely new view. He found ideas in these materials which were capable of a poetic mode of contemplation, and were of quite another nature to that presented by the common tragedies and comedies; the thoughts which strike us in these plays are not merely generally of a moral, but at the same time of a political nature. As such, they are not capable of severe formal concentration; their representation required and necessitated a succession of circumstances and changes which can alone render perceptible to the senses the results of political actions; if it were conceivable for a poet to catch a political idea without being incited by the history, he would be obliged to give it a wide historical basis, in order to render apparent the nature of the political actions and their wide-spreading effects. Nothing is, therefore, more natural than that Shakespeare should find the scope of one drama too narrow for his dramatic treatment of history, and that his histories should twice group themselves into tetralogies, both of which work out the same idea, which a less lengthened material would only have rendered imperfectly perceptible. The representation of ideas that step beyond the domestic circle, of characters whose moral development requires just as much breadth as the passionate nature of tragic characters demands depth, of actions incapable of compression into one catastrophe, and requiring rather epic fulness, all this has been accomplished by Shakespeare in his histories, and he has thus enriched

dramatic poetry with a new species, which offers to the serious reader less poetic enjoyment but more ample matter for reflection.

We have before observed, when we discussed Henry VI., that Shakespeare, even when he elaborated these pieces after Greene's original, had surveyed already, as a whole, the history of the strife of the red and white Roses; that he had penetrated the poetic value of these events, and probably even at the early commencement had conceived the double plan, in the first place of completing the tragic decline of the House of York, adding Richard III. to the last part of Henry VI., and then of placing in opposition to this tetralogy the corresponding one of the rise of the House of Lancaster. We also remarked there that the idea which pervades the whole cycle of these eight pieces is the question as to what relation the claims of the hereditary right of the incapable, however good, who endanger throne and country, bear to the claims of the merit of the capable, however bad, if they save and maintain the State. We will give our attention to this subject, considering first of all the close of the York tragedy, Richard III.

RICHARD III.

It has before been incidentally mentioned that a Latin drama upon Richard III. was performed at Cambridge by Dr. Legge previous to 1583, and that an English tragedy, 'the true tragedy of Richard III.,' appeared in print in 1594, though it may have been written about the year 1588. Both are published in the writings of the Shakespeare Society. The first is an exercise of style and verse extended into three parts, and reminding us here and there of Shakespeare's work, only because the author uses the same historical source; the insignificant English piece, on the contrary, must have been known to Shakespeare, although his work scarcely shows any reminiscence of it. Richard III. is Shakespeare's first tragedy of undoubted personal authorship; it is written in connection with Henry VI., and appears as its direct continuation. The opening scene, in which Richard reflects upon the path before him, is the sequel to the similar soliloquy in Henry VI. (Part III. Act III. sc. 2). In many touches of character, the poet refers to that play; Richard's plan of casting suspicion upon Clarence is there prepared for; the whole position of the aged Margaret is traced to the curse which York pronounced against her in Henry VI. (Part III. Act I. sc. 4). Yet here, as in Henry VI., the pure dramatic form is not so universally adhered to as in Richard II., which immediately follows. In the scenes where the trilogy of the common lamentation of the women (Act II. sc. 2, and Act IV. sc. 1) alternates like a chorus, dramatic truth is sacrificed to the lyric or epic form, and to conceits in the style of the pastoral Italian poetry; these scenes call to mind the passages in Henry VI., where the murderers of father and son lament over the slain. The form of these scenes (*στιχομυθίαι*) is borrowed from the ancient drama, of which the older plays of Shakespeare repeatedly remind us. Thus the introduction of Dira, of the uttered curse and its fulfilment, is quite in the

spirit of antiquity; and here again the clumsy accumulation of the curses of that fearful Margaret betrays the incipient tragic poet. In all this, Richard III. shows extraordinary progress when compared to Henry VI. Even in his knowledge of the historical facts, Shakespeare is here more exact and certain than his predecessor in Henry VI., in which play he had himself shown no improvement on this point; the conformity to the Chronicle in all the actions taken from it, comprising a period of fourteen years, is extraordinarily true. The poetic diction, however much it reminds us of Henry VI., has gained surprisingly in finish, richness, and truth; we need only compare the words of Anne at the beginning (Act I. sc. 2) with the best parts of Henry VI., to find how thoroughly they are animated with the breath of passion, how pure and natural is their flow, and how entirely the expression is but the echo of the feeling. In the design of his characters he has greatly advanced in variety and individual acuteness; Shakespeare himself has not often again succeeded in depicting with such scanty means, and in colours so life-like and agreeable, such complete types of character as the two princes. But even this characterisation has the peculiarity of Shakespeare's earlier works, and is plain, open, and over-evident; whilst immediately afterwards, in Richard II., we see the inclination to conceal the key to the characters as deeply as possible. Lastly, the plainest internal evidence as to the comparatively early origin of Richard III. is the abundance of tragic motives and moments in this tragedy, the accumulation of bloody crimes which the poet has imputed to the hero, to some extent without the warrant of historical testimony, and the bitter severity with which he displays the historical circumstances: showing the dreadful results of civil war on a base and ruined house, and how on its ruin the most depraved among the depraved elevates himself, till he too is buried in the common fall.

If we would in the first place more accurately understand the basis on which Shakespeare constructs his tragedy, it will assist us much to remember the various plays on the Wars of the Roses, in their due succession. In Richard II. the spoiled scion of the Black Prince stands young and feeble amid the great ambitious men of a proud and warlike nobility. In Henry IV. this nobility appears in powerful contest with the new ruler. In Henry V.'s time, patriotic heroism has become a kind of common property. In the time of Henry VI. those

heroic forms, Talbot, Bedford, and Salisbury, are still conspicuous; they are then lost in the struggles with France and in domestic civil wars. In Edward IV.'s time appears that Earl of Warwick, the last representative of the nobles of the old race, whose fall marks the ruin of the armed aristocracy and the commencement of a new civil order. The peace which succeeded to the great bloody drama of internal strife under Edward IV. is strikingly characterised by Shakespeare in the last acts of Henry VI. and in the first of Edward III. The civil war had ceased; but a domestic war in the ruling family forms a fearful sequel, and at last turns the royal palace into a slaughter-house. On account of a foolish prophecy the king prosecutes his faithful helper, his brother Clarence. The poor upstart family of his wife beset the throne greedily and with offensive arrogance, and foster the hatred which without them was already growing up among the brothers of the house of York. Even in Henry VI. the two young brothers had disdained the low inclination of the king in his union with an inferior family; in Richard III. he continues his voluptuous life with Mistress Shore, and his Hastings shares it with him. This sincere friend of the king, who even after his sovereign's death is opposed to Gloster's scheme for the young princes, is thrown into prison by the queen's relatives, and is released only through the favour of that amorous enchantress who holds the king enchained. A deadly hatred is thus sown against the friends of the queen, and this hatred is stirred up by Gloster both in him and in Buckingham. In this state of things the king's sickness happens; on his death-bed a pretended peace, as the Chronicle says, behind which secret plots lurk, is made between Grey and Rivers, the relatives of the queen, and Hastings and Buckingham, their enemies. The public voice (Act II. sc. 3.) compares the bad state of things, when Henry VI. stood surrounded by so many grave counsellors and relatives solely on his father's side, with the present state, when the relatives on both sides full of emulation and envy are opposed to each other; 'by a divine instinct'—these words Shakespeare indeed found in the Chronicle—'men's minds mistrust ensuing danger.' 'The position of things,' says Holinshed, 'and the temper of men was such, that no one could say whom he ought to trust, and whom he ought to fear.' There was a universal birth of hostility and hypocrisy, of inversion and dissimulation, and Shakespeare is historically fully justified in representing the age as a bare desert in men and characters, extirpated as

they had been in the immense ravages of the civil wars, and as a field ripe with intrigues and sneaking wickedness, which had grown up luxuriantly in the sudden change to peace and to Circean luxury at court. Perhaps there is nothing which can initiate the mind so instantaneously into the historical feeling of our poet, and at the same time reveal to it so deeply the great moral earnestness with which he laboured at his work, as comparing his delineation of the times of Edward IV. with the first part of the play of that name by Thomas Heywood, in which the intercourse of the king with the tanner of Tamworth and Jane Shore is represented as harmless, just as if we had to do with a merry age and an innocent condition of society.

At this period, and in such company, the fearful Gloster appears with the dangerous consciousness of the superiority of his endowments, and at the same time with acute penetration into the baseness and inability of the men around him. In this world, where each holds that for good which brings gain, he has learned to construct his system out of the principle of evil; his blind ignoble self-reliance raises him above inferior minds, the pride of his intelligence elevates him above the moral law. That the world belongs to the wise and strong was the principle of Machiavelli, whom the poet even in Henry VI. gave him as an example and master; he saw before him, though in the distance, the throne, which he took as the aim of his ambition; he threw down the dull beings around him to serve as steps thitherward. Everything hinges upon the right understanding of this character in the understanding of the whole piece. The English stage has at all times felt the highest degree of interest in this work for the sake of this one character. The greatest actors of England—Burbage, Garrick, and Kean—have treated this Richard as a favourite part, which even seemed especially suited to the small stature of the first two of these men. Kemble has written a treatise upon the conception of this character. Even in Shakespeare's time (in 1614) a poet, perhaps Christopher Brooke, wrote a poem in stanzas entitled: 'the Ghost of Richard III.,' which is published in the works of the Shakespeare Society; he alludes in it with commendation to Shakespeare's tragedy. The ghost of Richard is represented, while he depicts his character, life, and end; the poem is interesting as showing how human nature was understood at that period, as an evidence that even at that time the effort was made to penetrate intelligently and keenly into the soul of such a character. In a theme so magnificent

for dramatic art, we must not therefore neglect carefully to gather together all the traits which the poet has noted down for the just comprehension of this character.

The Chronicles of Holinshed and Hall contain the life of Richard for the most part in a translation of the Latin biography of the king by Thomas Moore, who had his information probably from Archbishop Morton, a contemporary, the same person who appears in our play as Bishop of Ely. From this source Shakespeare found the following scanty but acute touches for the characterisation of his hero: 'Richard was born with teeth, he was ugly, his left shoulder higher than his right. Wickedness, anger, envy, belonged to his nature, a quick sharp wit to his mind. He was a good captain; with large gifts he got him unsteadfast friendship, for which he was fain to pill and spoil in other places, and got him steadfast hatred. Close and secret, a deep dissembler, lowly of countenance, he was at the same time imperious and arrogant of heart, disdainful even in death, outwardly companionable where he inwardly hated, not letting to kiss whom he thought to kill: despitious and cruel, not for evil will alway, but oftener for ambition and policy. If his safety or his ambition interfered, he spared neither friend nor foe.' Not one of these traits, which appear not unfrequently to contradict each other, has been omitted by Shakespeare, and we might also say that he has not added one to them; but he has given life to the lifeless touches, harmony to the contradictory, and this in a manner certainly demanding the study of the most profound actor and his rarest gifts.

As the reproach of bastardy which oppresses Edmund in Lear first leads him on the path of criminal designs, so is Richard oppressed by the unsuitableness of his ambitious mind with the deformity of his body, which has deprived him from the very first of even his mother's love and has subjected him to the derision of his enemies—a deformity which his shadow in the sun showed him every hour, and to descant on which was his delight. The thought gnaws him of revenging himself on the injustice of nature by proving a villain, in order to mock her work on his body by the deformity which he thinks to bestow on his soul. In the clatter of arms, and in the time of war, his military glory outshone these defects of nature, and he had no leisure for descanting on them; but now, in the luxurious days of peace, when Edward and his favourites courted the Shores, military arts were no longer esteemed, and he now feels for the

first time how unformed he is for the deeds of love; his ill-humour against the age whets his ill-humour at his appearance, and the one acts upon the other. His political schemes urge him however to attempt the work of love at the end of his ill-humoured reflections, and he stands the test, wooing as an agreeable bridegroom, and winning where it seems most incredible; the poet robs him forthwith of the pretence of justifying his baseness by his ugliness. But whilst he now finds cause to rejoice in his shadow, whilst he loses that ground for self-contempt upon which he desired to base his villainous designs, he acquires all the greater contempt of men, from the knowledge that the young and beautiful widow of the brilliant and genuinely royal Edward of Wales yields herself in a moment to him who not long before had murdered her lord.

If a portion of the bitterness and soured rage that lies in Richard's nature was rooted in this self-contempt of his outward appearance, his contempt of men on the other hand is grounded on the liberal gifts which nature has bestowed on his mind, and on the self-reliance which a comparison with the men around him inspired. Of consummate powers of speech, of animated mind and piercing wit, Shakespeare depicts him throughout in accordance with the Chronicle; in his hypocritical wooing of Anne, in his sarcasm, and in his equivocal language, this gift of a biting and malicious wit is called into play. He exhibits similar adroitness in his dealings with men; and here his contempt of all, scarcely to be dissembled even by this master of dissimulation, is clearly manifested. He entraps the stupidly faithful Clarence with tears; he makes the sincere Hastings believe even to the last that he may take every liberty with him; he leads the exasperated enemies at court to hatred and murder, whilst he remains in the background; he appears tractably to follow the ambitious Buckingham, whilst he is using him as a pioneer for all his secret ways; he preys upon his enemies by means of friends and tools whom he uses and subsequently rejects. When the sails of his ambition are yet well filled, he regards the Greys, the Buckinghams, and the Stanleys as inoffensive, good-natured simpletons, all in equal manner, when indeed the first alone proves himself to be so; the second is subsequently called by himself 'deep, revolving, and witty,' he finds him subsequently to be penetrating and cunning, and the third at last catches him in the snares of his own artifices. With cruel scorn and the killing taunt of irony he

allows the true-hearted Hastings to pride himself on his favour with him, while he is casting him into the jaws of death; with sarcastic contempt he calls Buckingham his oracle, 'his prophet,' when most accommodatingly he dances on his own rope; with a clumsy farce he has the crown tendered to himself by the Mayor and Aldermen, in a scene which we can only represent when we regard the bulk of mankind as simple spectators of the tricks which few actors have skill enough to play on the world's stage.) To play the first part on this stage, that of the hero and the king, has become in this despised society the goal of his ambition, and it attracts him all the more, the further it is removed from him by circumstances and by a numerous kindred with pre-legitimate claims.

The feeling of his mental superiority, of his political and military gifts, which makes him consciously step upon the path of crime and renders him the ridiculer and despiser of men, makes him also a despiser of every moral law, and stamps upon him that unshackled nature which disregards every tie of blood, every barrier of right, and every moral scruple. To regard morality and feeling, he calls in Elizabeth to be 'peevish found in great designs.' (He calls conscience a word that cowards use, devised at first to keep the strong in awe, and this awe he has overcome. It is indifferent to him, when he at last is on the way to despair, what the other side of this life may bring. With this stifled conscience he appears more heartless than the murderers whom he hired for Clarence and the Princes; with frightful coolness he meditates upon the death of the 'simple plain Clarence,' and jests over his certain prey; he loves the obdurate mates, whom, with those words of Suffolk in Henry VI., he enjoins to despatch 'this thing;' he speaks with the expression of coarse insensibility of the 'fellow,' the corpse of the murdered king Henry VI. Thus he spreads terror around him and practises the art of tyrants, that of making themselves feared. He makes use of the feeling of suspense succeeding the first executions, and proceeds with giant steps, until he wades so deep in blood that sin hurries him on to sin. Margaret, hungering for revenge, sees him with delight preying rapaciously, like a greedy hound, upon 'the issue of his mother's body.')

This barbarity, this wild nature, the soldier spirit of the man bred in war and blood, and the aristocratic pride of high birth, seem at variance with the gift of consummate dissimulation,

with which he is at the same time endowed, appearing now in affected humility, now in decoying amiability, and now in the saintly character of the pious penitent. The Chronicle indeed invests him in one breath with the qualities of a pleasing nature and of an arrogant heart; and the poet also has represented him in rapid alternations of ungoverned outbursts of rage and scorn, and then again in the gloss of the sweetest language; now he is depicted in the nature and appearance of the easily sifted or of the impenetrable dissembler, and then again in the character of a man of coarse manners, utterly incapable of the arts of flattery and dissimulation. It has been doubted whether these different qualities could be compatible. Could a man to whom hypocrisy was so natural indulge so far in barbarity and coarseness of morals as to reach such a pitch of habitual bloodthirstiness? Or if this cruelty was his more true nature, could such a furious man be at the same time master of the most consummate art of dissimulation? Or is it conceivable that the man who resolved so self-consciously and considerately and with such calm calculation to tread the path of the villain, should spread fear and terror around him only with subtle intention, and accomplish his bloody deeds, as the Chronicle insinuates, without any real natural propensity and from policy alone? The poet, like his historical source, has taken Richard's proud aspiring ambition, the result of his superiority of mind, as the spring of his actions, and hypocrisy as the principle means and instrument of his schemes. Discovering this means in his nature, Richard matures in that soliloquy in Henry VI. (Part III. Act III. sc. 2) the far-reaching designs of his ambition. The poet has placed this quality as the central point of his character; the relation and the position into which he brought it with regard to the rest of the nature of this wonderful monster, as he found it indicated in the Chronicle, is one of those psychological master-touches with which this man has so often set up Columbus' egg.

The form of character which we commonly think qualified for hypocrisy is that of sneaking and cunning weakness, such as Elizabeth presents in our play, and Stanley also, who is called a fox in the Chronicle. But this form of character would never have obtained a great tragic interest. Unless the exercise of this art of dissimulation exhibited a power which invested it with merit, even though of an equivocal character, it would be impossible to gain sympathy for the hypocritical hero.

Shakespeare adhered, therefore, closely to the characteristics of history and of his own historical source. His Richard is a warrior of unequivocal valour. His nature possesses that which seems precisely most at variance with all hypocrisy. He is innately impetuous and has a passionate and irritable disposition; he has inherited from his mother the nervous sensitiveness of not being able to bear censure; he was tetchy and wayward in his infancy; he was frightful, desperate, wild, and furious in his school-days, and daring, bold, and venturous in the prime of manhood; it is a necessity to him to give free vent to his malicious tongue; in the midst of the hypocrisy and flattery of love his scorn breaks out; and even when he is thoroughly playing the hypocrite, he likes to place himself in a position which offers no constraint to his nature. His unjust hatred and secret snares against the relatives of the queen are concealed by him under the mask of open and just anger at the hatred professed by *them*. In this brusque nature, which sets a bold face against objections, difficulties, and dangers, there lies, as we see, even an aversion to cringe and to stoop, and only in his strivings after the position in which each is to stoop before him does he consent to the sacrifice of employing every convenient semblance. The hypocrisy of his character has thus only become matured with years, and he appears at once proud and cunning, crafty and bloody, more bland but more destructive. His resolve and scheme have led him not only to become a villain, but to conceal his villany and its ends as much as possible. A character thus designed requires great self-mastery and unusual power of mind and soul, to render those talents of dissimulation, however innately they may exist, capable of governing the inherent ferocity. And therefore it is that at the issue of his fate, when misfortune overtakes him, when his inner strength fails, and when the elastic power of his self-command gives way, the mantle of hypocrisy falls suddenly from his shoulder; his old and earlier nature returns; the violent obstinacy of his disposition emerges anew; he loses his head, which he had had so much under his control during the long career of his ambitious strivings, and the torment of his soul betrays itself at every moment, as in thought and purpose he alternates, leaves his cause, and becomes a prey to confusion. Before this, so long as he is master of himself, he carries the art of dissimulation to such a height that by an art in wooing which reminds us of Romeo's in its fervour, by flattery, and by

the magic power of language, he gains over the beautiful widow, whose relatives and husband he had killed; he bears the spittings of the wooed, and, already sure of his success, offers her his sword to stab him; he carries hypocrisy to such a height that he appears as the one persecuted and threatened, while he is undermining and destroying everything; he plays the awkward blusterer where his hatred steals most covertly and most maliciously; he makes his brutal manners to be feared where his most refined intrigues are to be still more so; and thus the actor has carefully to discern when his violence is an outburst of nature and when it is a part assumed. He carries the art of dissimulation to such a height that he, the terror of men, surrounded with religious works and exercises, can be called gentle and tender, too childishly foolish for the world; that in body and soul a devil he can appear like an angel of light; that an enemy like Rivers believes in his devotion, an honest man like Hastings in his perfect inability for concealment, an Anne in his repentance for his bloody pursuit of war, and the falling Clarence in his brotherly love. On the final step to the throne he vies with Buckingham in hypocrisy, acting those clumsy scenes which were to appear as compelling him to accept the crown from world-despising and pious considerations; at the extreme point, in his impatience, he lets fall the mask of cunning with which he had hitherto concealed the hypocritical part he was acting. As soon as he is at the goal he approaches Buckingham with barefaced demand for murder, and inquires of the first page for a hireling's dagger; he finds it no longer necessary to maintain secrecy, he does not force himself in the least to conceal his ill-humour and displeasure from Buckingham. Only when danger threatens him from Richmond's preparations, when he tries to prevent Richmond's union with the daughter of the widowed queen by his own union with her, then, compelled to it in his interview with the crafty Elizabeth, he has once more recourse to those same magic arts, with the same masterly power as before in his wooing of Anne, and with the same success. But immediately after, when the curses of Margaret are fulfilled upon him, and he loses his safety, his self-confidence, and his power over himself, his heart perishes with his fortune.

The threads are feeble which ally Richard's character to the good side of human nature. Had he not found such a being in authenticated books of history, Shakespeare would perhaps not

have ventured to depict him, or subsequently Edmund and Iago. The poet has endeavoured to obtain an interest for him by making still stronger the threads which link him to the bad. The strength of his will is not alone turned against others, but against his own nature also, and this self-command challenges human admiration at all times. Even that benumbing of the conscience does not proceed from innate hardening and obduracy, but from a victory over its most serious emotions. This one thread which links this monster with the bright side of human nature has been most ingeniously inserted by the poet. Unbelieving as he appears, this hero of wickedness is nevertheless not free from superstition; this betrays the not wholly vanquished conscience, and the slight trace of the germ of good within him. When Margaret (Act I. sc. 3) pours out her curses upon him, he interrupts her before the decisive word, and endeavours to lead her curse back upon herself. He freely denies the operation of curses, but only because in truth he fears their effect. The greatness of Richmond, prophesied already by Henry VI., is a remembrance which strikes him with paralysing power when he hears of his undertakings. A fortune-teller has prophesied his death soon after he had seen Richmond; this he recalls anxiously to mind (the trait is borrowed from the Chronicle) when he hears the name of Rougemont. When he thinks on the death of the innocent princes, he remembers the popular saying, 'So wise so young do ne'er live long,' as if he sought a consolation in this, sheltering himself behind such a decree of fate; even in the case of the women whom he deludes, he endeavours to trace back his misdeeds to inevitable destiny. The gentle voice, which consciousness and will repress in him by day, makes its way through all hindrances by night, when his intellectual powers are at rest; he is ever harassed by frightful dreams, and before the day of the battle with Richmond there rise before him (and this too in accordance with the historical legend) the tormenting spirits of those murdered by him, filling him with despondency; the repressed conscience avenges itself by night, and in that decisive night overwhelms him. He who in his realistic freemindedness would fain have denied all higher powers, and by his hypocrisy would fain have deceived even Heaven itself, at last yields to their open might. The fearful warnings cause cold drops to stand on his brow, he is betrayed by the short anxious questions which he utters with difficulty, he sinks in a final effort to flatter himself and to feign

self-love, and in a last attempt of his exhausted power to master the inner voice: the thousand tongues of conscience prevail over the thousand tongues of self-concealment. Still he has vigour enough to struggle in desperate combat with the powers within, still 'a thousand hearts are great within his bosom,' and with shattered energies he rouses himself to do wonders in the fight, and, as the Chronicle intimates, perishes in his defiance. He fell, says the author of the 'Ghost of Richard,' 'when greatness would be greater than itself;' and this overweening power of the will fashions the fearful man into that genuinely tragic being who compels our sympathy in spite of the depravity which repels us from him.

No greater task has ever been presented to the actor. The charm and the greatness of this task do not lie, as Steevens says, in the fact that the actor has by turns to exhibit the hero, the lover, the statesman, the buffoon, the hypocrite, the hardened and the repentant sinner; nor in the fact that he has to alternate between the extreme of passion and the most familiar tone of conversation, between the expression of confidence at one time in the power of the warrior, at another in the cunning of the diplomatist, and at another in the rhetoric of the flattering lover; and that he has to produce sharp transitions and the finest shading, and to master every pantomimic and rhetorical art; but it lies in this, that out of all these tones he has to find the leading fundamental note which unites them all. The poet has taken the characteristics from the Chronicle, but in the chief point he has made a thorough alteration. The Chronicle seems to make Richard hypocritical by nature, and to exhibit cruelty in him rather as a cold work of policy; but the poet has made the inclination to brutality innate in him, and hypocrisy on the contrary appears only as a means chosen for his ambition. The soliloquies in Henry VI., and that at the commencement of our play, make this indubitable. The poet has perhaps intentionally placed the whole character in a contrast, of rare interest to the lover of art, with that of Henry V. In his early years Prince Henry leads a wild dissolute life without reflection, following half involuntarily the mere impulses of nature, not quenching his nobler nature, but concealing and veiling it, yielding to his social propensity for low pleasures, though at the same time consciously resolving to lay aside this character at a future period in his kingly position. Richard, on the other hand, whom circumstances had led to a career of war-

fare—in which, working for his family rather than for himself, he might have become an estimable if not an amiable man—Richard deliberates, at the first interruption of this life of outward action, upon setting aside his military bias, and devises a wide scheme of diplomacy and intrigue which is to bring him to the throne. The most remarkable and opposite parts are presented to the actor in the two characters: that of Henry, which is to be acted with an utter absence of all idea of comedy, is a type of plain human nature; and Richard, who is a Proteus in the arts of metamorphosis, who calls himself Roscius, and who with the arts of an actor obtains the crown.

Once this character is established, and its central point perceived, the central point and the idea of the piece is also apprehended; for Richard fills this centre entirely. This exclusively prominent position of Richard and his highly tragic nature have given this history the character rather of a pure tragedy; just as in Shakespeare's freest tragedies all the persons of the play are arranged with an inner relation to this principal figure and to the principal idea of the piece, whilst the peculiarity of historical plays is usually that the events and facts are distributed among more extensive groups of acting characters, who are not maintained throughout in the close connection exhibited by the characters of plays freely designed and unfettered by historical material. By considering the other characters of the piece separately and in relation to Richard, we shall easily perceive the chain of ideas which links them together.

The overstrained masculine strength of Richard appears in the first place contrasted with the feminine weakness of the female characters. Anne, whom he wooes at the beginning of the play, excites less contempt than pity in her frail womanliness, which is without all moral support. She hates and marries; she curses her who shall be the wife of the man who killed her first husband, and she subjects herself to this curse; afterwards as a wife she is leagued with his enemies against him. Thus, says the poet of the 'Ghost of Richard,'

> **Women's griefs, nor loves, are dyed in grain,**
> **For either's colour time or men can stain.**

Not often has a task been ventured upon like that of the poet in this instance. He produces a scene full of improbability, the principal part in which is played by this Anne, whose character is prepared or delineated in no other scene, in the most

unnatural situation. Vanity, self-complacency, and weakness have all to be displayed at once; it is the part of the matron of Ephesus in the tragedy, though it is neither incredible nor forced. We must at the same time bear in view that the murder of her relatives admits of excuse as among the unavoidable evils of war and defence. We must take into account the extraordinary degree of dissimulation, which deceives even experienced men; and for this reason the artist who is to play Richard must woo rather as an actor than as a lover, but must yet go to the very limits of deception even as regards the initiated spectator. We have further to consider how the part of repentance and atonement becomes a valiant soldier, and how pardonable is the womanly weakness which delights in the idea of endeavouring to support and save such a penitent. We must remember that the unwonted mildness of the tyrant is far more effective than the gentleness of the weak; and in the historical examples of our own day we have seen how tender feminine characters have been united to the most brutal, in the conciousness of at any rate restraining the human barbarity at home. How little the poet scrupled at this scene he seemed to desire to prove by again repeating it towards the end of the play in Richard's suit with the mother herself—his sworn enemy—for her own daughter. Once more does Richard assert that he committed his misdeeds only out of love for the wooed one, once more he plays the penitent and points to better times, once more he allures the mother by the prospect of the throne for her daughter; he obtains her assent by the false show of the good that she will thus procure to the country; and fear—so says the Chronicle—fear of the man whom no one can refuse with impunity, in part co-operates. This last circumstance, indeed, places Elizabeth in a more favourable light than Anne, as he wooed the latter at a period when he had not become the all-powerful one he subsequently became. But there is another more important point which prevents this second scene from appearing as a mere copy of the first. Elizabeth promises her daughter at the same time to the Pretender Richmond, the descendant of Lancaster, who subsequently by this union reconciles and joins the red and white Roses. Elizabeth thus deceives the deceiver of all; and, in the chance of the unsuccessful issue of Richmond's undertaking, she has thus saved the throne for her daughter. This is certainly to be traced to the womanly weakness of her personal and maternal ambition, but it is also

the result of that deep dissimulation which so often belongs by nature to the woman, and is even coupled with a kind of innocence. This contrast of Elizabeth to Richard is laid hold of in the happiest manner. She is weak and she is goaded by her relatives to animosity and family antipathy, but she is also good, and in the extreme of grief she is gentle and incapable of cursing, though she would fain learn it from Margaret. With this goodness and weakness she deceives the strong and cunning man who has destroyed her house, for she is prudent and far-sighted, she is the mother of her son York of kindred mind, she sees through Gloster from the first, and she anticipates at once in Rivers' fall the ruin of her whole family; she subsequently conceives the plan, and this is taken from history, of reconciling in Richmond the houses of York and Lancaster, and she is the soul of the whole conspiracy which determines Richard's fall.

The counterpart of her weakness is afforded by the king; he is a contrast to her acuteness. He and his brother Clarence form a contrast of unsuspicious security compared to the malicious brother, who strikes them both together, and by means of each other. The relatives also of the queen are trusting and unsuspicious; a greedy, newly-created nobility, haughty and scornful, humble only towards the rough Gloster into whose open snares they fall. Still more distinctly is the contrast with unsuspiciousness delineated in Hastings. He is open-hearted, true, talkative, sincere, unsuspicious in his happiness, loose in morals, but a stranger to all mistrust. He trusts in Catesby as in Richard, he suffers neither warnings nor dreams to disturb him, he triumphs with imprudent joy over the fall of his enemies, though the same lot is threatening him; confident in Richard's friendship, he is ready to 'give his voice' for him in the council when Richard had already devoted him to death, because with the same unvaried candour, and with a nature incapable of dissimulation, he had declared that the crown would be 'foully misplaced' on Richard's head. The whole scene (Act III. sc. 4) in which this takes place is borrowed from the Chronicle, even in the characteristic peculiarities of the language used. The relation in which Shakespeare has placed Brackenbury is, on the contrary, his own property; historically, he plays a totally different part to that in the tragedy. In a passive manner, as Catesby and Tyrrel in an active, he furthers the plans and deeds of Richard, which without these ready tools would not have had the same easy course. These are the hired

hypocrites who at every sign accept the part required, who turn round at every wind; who do not, like Brackenbury, ask themselves nor honourably consider what is the feeling of their heart; who will be 'guiltless of the meaning,' and unscrupulously and obtusely let happen what will. A more cunning tool of Gloster's is Buckingham. He stands by his side as a faint imitation of his ambition and of his hypocritical heart. He has smaller objects in his desire for aggrandisement, as Richard has his larger ones; and for the furtherance of these he tries to use Richard as a tool, just as Richard uses him. Gloster helps him to remove the relatives of the queen who stand in his way, and Buckingham affects reconciliation with them, under cover of which he works their death. In return for this he helps Gloster to make his way to the throne, and that with the same arts. He fancies himself a genuine actor, who has at his service 'ghastly looks' and 'enforced smiles;' he helps to influence the citizens, he takes part in the farces at Baynard's castle. He appears only by degrees drawn into Gloster's snares; Margaret even regards him at first as innocent; her curses touch him not; he believes not in curses, as Gloster also affects not to do, but he is taught to do so; in everything falling short of Richard, in bad as in good, he shudders at the murder which the other demands from him; when he is out of humour at the withholding of the reward which Richard had promised him for his assistance, he can no longer dissemble; whilst Gloster, at the moment of his ill-humour against Hastings, appears particularly pleased and cheerful. In contrast to him again stands Stanley, the true sneaking hypocrite, who conquers Richard with his own weapons, as Elizabeth does in her feminine manner. Related to Richmond, he has cause, from the first, to act cautiously. From being a foe to the Queen Elizabeth, he has become a friend to the common object; he has his eye everywhere; he warns Hastings, although in vain; he carries on a lasting connection with Richmond, which, in the simplest manner, he carries on through a priest. History itself considers it incomprehensible that Richard, blinded as by God, did not arrest the suspicious man; Shakespeare endeavours to explain this conduct by bestowing on Stanley exactly the same arts as those which Gloster possesses. As the latter sought to conceal his secret intrigues from the Greys by open displeasure, so Stanley throughout boldly declares himself a watchful observer of Richmond's plans; he is the first to bring Richard the intelligence of Dorset's flight to

Richmond; he brings him the intelligence of Richmond's landing; he leaves his son as a hostage, and in this case of need stakes the life dearest to him that he may play out his deceptive part, which costs Richard his kingdom and life and brings a crown to Richmond.) This latter is the only pure character, predicting better times. The poet thought it necessary to do but little in honour of the founder of the house of Tudor, the grandfather of Queen Elizabeth, after having blackened his enemy Richard as much as possible. The pious general of God had been like the princes, Edward's sons, early removed from this dreadful society of the Court; the blessing of Henry VI. rested on him. The princes, on the contrary, fall a sacrifice to the fearful age. Upon this we shall remark further in King John. (The delineation of the two boys is a masterpiece of the poet, which would have been impossible to such men as Greene and Marlowe. With what scanty means does he develop a disposition in the Prince of Wales which promises a perfect manhood! In his words on his father's death and title, how much there is of tender feeling and modesty! In the censuring question to his brother ('a beggar'?) what a delicate reminder of propriety! In his reply to Gloster: 'I fear no uncles dead, an if they live, I hope I need not fear;' what caution, and at the same time what acuteness of mind is exhibited in the equivocal words! And in what beautiful contrast to this stands again the quick wit of the bold, precocious, pert, and clever York, which he so delicately weakens by a kindly blunting of its sting! In both, we should think, the opposite qualities of hypocrisy and regardless candour are moderated into qualities natural and human, in Edward into delicate respect and caution, in York into impulsive expression, scarcely restraining a saucy thought, but yet knowing how to temper it forbearingly, so that even these two characters are placed in a fine relation to the main idea of the play.)

After having considered all these counterparts and opposites to Richard, it may appear as if, when combined, they were not powerful enough to form a corresponding counterbalance to the overwhelming nature of the hero. (The poet also has sought for a still more forcible contrast, in order that he may exhibit an eye capable of watching over the malicious course of the raging boar, and a power capable of crossing him; to his advancing success he has opposed a fallen fortune, to his deep hypocrisy a regardlessness which every moment tears asunder the veil, to

his bloodthirstiness a carelessness which mocks at death. It is that Margaret, the widow of king Henry VI., who once came over to England as a beggar, who planted there the seeds of evil, who turned upon her own head every calamity and the hatred of all, who is now outlawed, and who at the close goes back again to France as a beggar. Before she accomplishes this —and this is a poetic arrangement on the part of our poet— the hated one tarries in the midst of the hated society, in order that she may witness the end of the fearful tragedy, though she herself had already withdrawn from the scene. Poor, insensible to ambition, she scorns the danger and death to which her remaining exposes her; she presses into the circle of her enemies, and wholly incapable of commanding herself, and utterly unwilling to conceal herself or her feelings, with impotent passion, with incautious openness, and with prophetic rage, she casts forth the most unsparing reproaches, the most regardless truths, and the most fearful curses—like the loud trumpet of God's judgment—upon the degraded humanity around her. And these words have more weight and power than all the bloody deeds of Richard and his cunning intrigues, and her hunger for revenge is more appeased than Richard's thirst for greatness. The old York (in Henry VI.) had once cursed her, when she committed the womanly outrage of giving him a napkin bathed in the blood of his son Rutland; his curse was fulfilled on her when she lost throne, husband, and the son whom Richard stabbed, and at whose fall Rivers, Grey, Hastings, and Vaughan were present as accessories. But on this day the power of York's curse was transferred to her, and her vengeance-loving soul panted with desire to requite it upon all her enemies. The manifold misery which she lives to see befall her enemies sweetens her own misery, and she would fain 'slip her weary head' out of the yoke of her sorrow, to leave the burden of it upon the hated Elizabeth. We have said before (in Henry VI.) that the Chronicle also remarks at the death of Margaret's son that all those present drank subsequently of the same cup, 'in consequence of the merited justice and the due punishment of God.' This judgment is embodied in the fearful Margaret and her curses, in which the avenging spirit utters its terrible decree. With striking glaringness, distinctness, and intensity, Shakespeare has pronounced, repeated, and accomplished these imprecations. Margaret hurled the curse over all the accomplices in the murder of her son, and in all it comes to maturity;

it is fulfilled in the dying Edward; it is fulfilled in Clarence, who perjured himself when he had promised to fight for Lancaster; it is fulfilled in Hastings, who had sworn false reconciliation in presence of the dying Edward; it is fulfilled in Elizabeth, who, only the vain semblance of herself, was left without brother, without husband, and almost without children; upon Buckingham her mere warning, directed by her to one still guiltless, falls like a curse when he becomes guilty. It is not enough that Margaret pronounces these curses upon all; most of them, Buckingham, Hastings, and Anne, call down the imprecation by sinful promises upon themselves, and when it is fulfilled the poet recalls once more to mind the exact prediction. Finally upon Richard himself these revengeful curses are heaped, and they are realised most decidedly. And he, too, in the moment of his unbridled scorn (Act IV. sc. 4), calls down the curse upon himself. Nay, more than this: his own mother, the Duchess of York, who, placed between Elizabeth and Margaret, by turns, according to time and circumstance, possesses the violent flashes of the one and the mild composure of the other, she, Richard's own mother, says to him (Act IV. sc. 4) that her prayers would 'fight for the adverse party;' and she desires that her curse on the day of battle may 'tire him more than all the complete armour that he wears.' Wonderful use is made of this curse in the scene before the battle of Bosworth, a use worth more than all the other occasions on which the poet has employed these imprecations. Without looking back to that maternal sentence, without himself remembering it, Richard's 'beaver' burdens him in the battle, so that he orders it to be made easier, and his arm is weary with the lance, which he exchanges for a lighter one. This is better than the accumulated impression of the severe curses, and their literal and ever-repeated fulfilment; and better, too, is the imprecation of the mother, temporarily irritated when occasion demanded it, than the steady excess of the revengeful curses of Margaret. But the excess and the repetition alone are to be blamed, not the thing itself. We must be careful of appearing on the side of those interpreters who consider the introduction of Margaret and her reproaches at Court absurd, as well as Richard's wooing in the street. For it is a wise contrast which necessitates the part assigned to Margaret, and even the glaring prominence given to her curses and their fulfilment has its wise intention. The more secretly the sins of this brood of hypocrites were

practised, the more visibly and notoriously was punishment to overtake them; the manifest retribution of God ought to be made all the more evident when employed against the secrecy and the deceit of men; and the interference of eternal justice ought plainly and tangibly to appear against the evil-doers, who think to ensnare Heaven itself, who believe not in an avenging power, nor in the curse which rests on evil deeds themselves. On the way to death Buckingham says:—

> **That high All-Seer which I dallied with**
> **Hath turn'd my feigned prayer on my head,**
> **And given in earnest what I begg'd in jest.**

And just so his own curse discharges itself on Richard's head, a curse which he wantonly called down upon himself.

RICHARD II.

THE date of Richard II. has been already pointed out; we conjectured that it was written soon after Richard III. Passionate high-strained passages, one even (Act v. sc. 3) which treats a tragic subject almost humorously, are written in rhyming couplets; alternate rhymes and alliteration also occur. In its profound design, and in its characters, as well as in the treatment of it in conformity with the historical story, the play shows certain progress when compared with Richard III. Setting aside stage effect, Coleridge justly calls it the first and most admirable of Shakespeare's purely historical plays, in which the history forms the story, and not, as in Henry IV., merely leads it. The historical events which Richard II. comprises extend from September 1398 to February 1400. Everything essential in the events is strictly taken from Holinshed's Chronicle; the only liberty Shakespeare allowed himself is in those externals which he never regarded when he could make them serve poetic objects.

Shakespeare had in this play also a previous dramatic work which, however, is unknown to us. We know only from the statement of a Dr. Forman that in 1611 a play of Richard II. was performed on Shakespeare's stage; and from the indication of its contents it must have handled the earlier years of Richard's reign, and must have been more rich in facts and more bloody than Shakespeare's work. An interesting historical incident is connected with this piece. When the Earl of Essex, in 1601, wished to excite the London citizens to an insurrection, in order that he might remove his enemies from the person of the queen, he ordered his confidential friends, Sir Gilly Merrick and others, to act the tragedy of Richard II. in public streets and houses, previous to the outbreak of the conspiracy, in order to inflame the minds of the people; Elizabeth hearing of this performance, alluded to it in conversation, calling herself

Richard II. There is no doubt that the play thus employed by these conspirators was this older Richard II. For Shakespeare's drama, though certainly a revolutionary picture, is of so mild a character, and it demands such hearty sympathy for the dethroned king, and most especially in the very scene of the deposition, that it would appear unsuitable for such an object; besides, in the editions before 1601 the whole scene of the deposition of Richard in the fourth act, although it must have been written by the poet at the outset, was not even printed, and certainly therefore was not acted in Elizabeth's reign. Nothing, however, is more natural than that from the extraordinarily practical character of these historical plays, even those of Shakespeare should be applied to such a purpose. In the last century, Shakespeare's Richard II. was performed at the time that the mercantile class in England were pressing for a war with Spain, and Robert Walpole opposed this popular policy; all the passages which concerned the restraint of the king among his flatterers were referred to Walpole, and were received with loud vociferations; others, upon the bankruptcy of the broken-hearted king, were heard with death-like and reverential silence.

Richard II. must be read in a series with Henry IV. and V. in order thoroughly to understand it. The finest touches for the explanation of characters and actions in the first play of the series are to be met with in passages of the third and fourth plays of the series, and we might almost say are intentionally concealed in them. The principal character of the fourth piece, Henry V., is already mentioned in the first, that is in Richard II., and his wild youth is pointed out at a period when he was only twelve years old. The character of the Duke of Aumerle, who plays no brilliant part in Richard II. after his mother has saved him from the punishment of high treason, and has prayed to God to make 'her old son new,' is again silently brought forward by the poet in Henry V., a new man indeed, who has become great with the heroic age, and dies the death of a hero at Agincourt. Thus the most delicate threads entwine around the four plays, uniting them together; other allusions equally delicate place this Lancastrian tetralogy in an opposite relation to that of York. The similarity of the historical events in the rise and fall of the two houses did not escape the poet; had he handled the history of the House of York, later in point of time, *after* instead of *before* the history of that of Lancaster, he would

have had the opportunity of marking these similarities and relations even more sharply in both cases. Richard II. appears in this tetralogy, as Henry VI. did in the York. A young prince, not without fine human talents, surrounded by uncles and arrogant protectors, by favourites and protégés, in both cases brings the kingdom to ruin; both lose their hereditary throne through usurpers, and die by violence in prison. Bolingbroke undermines Richard's throne in a similar manner to that in which York attacks that of Henry VI.; the one falls perjured before he has obtained the last object of his ambitious path; the other reaches his aim through fortune and merit, and maintains it by estimable administration and repentant compensation. But retribution threatens the one usurping house as well as the other; domestic discord reigns in the family of Henry IV. as among the sons of York under Edward IV. From this moment, however, the destinies of the two houses are sundered by a rigorous contrast, which we have pointed out before; from the ill-starred family circumstances under the Lancastrians rose Henry V., who in the midst of his wild youthful excesses took the grand resolution to restore to the English throne the splendour of the Edwards, whilst from the York house rose Richard III., who, in the midst of a career of warlike fame, forms the project of clearing for himself a way to the throne by a series of base actions. A great ruler in the one makes us forget by his virtues for a brief glorious period the misdeeds of the Lancastrians, in the other a bloody tyrant brings by his wickedness the utmost dishonour upon the house of York, and hurries it to ruin. As in these outer circumstances there is unmistakably a certain parallel between the two histories, we have also already frequently mentioned the similar idea which guided Shakespeare in the two tetralogies. The strife between merit and right for an unsettled crown might surely in Henry VI. be called the leading, and at any rate the prominent thought; in Richard III. it is replaced by a more ethical idea, which in this play somewhat interferes with its purely historical character; in Richard II., on the contrary, this thought is drawn from the historical matter, and is embraced by the poet with that perfect independence which enables him to form the historical material into a free work of art of a higher and more complete character than the history in itself affords.

Richard II. was the son of the Black Prince, Edward III.'s

brave eldest son. According to historical tradition he was most beautiful; and Shakespeare also, in contrasting him with Richard III., who is urged by his deformity to avenge himself on nature, has not unintentionally invested him with a beautiful form, which, according to Bacon, renders 'him generally light-minded whom it adorns, and whom it moves;' he calls him in the lips of Percy 'a sweet lovely rose.' He gives him the outward features of his father, and allows us occasionally to perceive a mental likeness also; the mild nature of the lamb and the violence of the lion, which the poet speaks of as combined in the Black Prince, are both exhibited in him. The first is scarcely to be mistaken; it becomes visible even at the last moment in the many tokens of attachment which he receives at a time when it is dangerous to manifest it, and it is apparent after his death in the longing for him which is aroused in the adversaries who had conspired against him. The other quality is more hidden in single scattered traits. He appears throughout like a 'young hot colt,' easily provoked, like a violent flame consuming itself quickly; he compares himself to the brilliant Phaeton, who, incapable and daring, tries to manage his refractory steeds; in the moment of misfortune the defiance of an innate nobility is aroused in the midst of his sorrow, and in his death he appears as 'full of valour as of royal blood." But this fine disposition is wholly obliterated; in the early season of his life and reign he has lost his reputation; he is surrounded by a troop of creatures and favourites, parasites and men who preyed on the kingdom, who stop his ear with flatteries, and poison it with wanton imaginations; who make him tyrannical and imperious, incapable of hearing a word of blame and admonition even from the lips of his dying uncle; men who made him shallow with Italian fashions, who surrounded him with every low vanity, and enticed him into ostentation and extravagance. In Henry IV. his life and actions are described in a passage of greater length than our own play affords. 'The skipping king,' it says,

> ambled up and down
> With shallow jesters, and rash bavin wits,
> Soon kindled and soon burn'd: carded his state;
> Mingled his royalty with capering fools;
> Had his great name profaned with their scorns:
> And gave his countenance, against his name,
> To laugh at gibing boys, and stand the push
> Of every beardless vain comparative:

> Grew a companion to the common streets,
> Enfeoff'd himself to popularity:
> That being daily swallowed by men's eyes,
> They surfeited with honey; and began
> To loathe the taste of sweetness, whereof a little
> More than a little is by much too much.

Shakespeare has given us little or nothing in Richard II. of scenes of this kind; only remotely can we perceive the intimate tone of the intercourse in which Aumerle and Bushy stood with the king and queen. The poet has left this merry frivolous society in the back ground, which perhaps, considering the play of Richard II. by itself, would be a defect; but he had matter of too similar a character to depict in Henry IV., and he was obliged to avoid repetition; he gave the jovial picture to the cheerful play, and left it out of the tragic one. In its stead, most wisely, that he might not make the tragedy of the national history laughable, he placed the serious and tragic side of this conduct. Incited by those around him, Richard had caused his faithful, well-meaning uncle Gloster, who, according to historical tradition, had assumed the protectorship of the young king, to be murdered, and this made his remaining uncles, Lancaster and York, apprehensive for their safety, although, as the Chronicle says, they concealed the sting of their discontent. Impoverished by his companions, Richard sees his coffers empty, he has recourse to forced loans, to extortion of taxes, and to fines; and at last he lets the English kingdom as a tenure to his parasites, no longer a king, only a landlord of England. A traitor to this unsubdued land, he has by his contracts resigned the conquests of his father. At length he lays hand on private property, and seizes the possessions of the late old Lancaster and of his banished son, thus depriving himself of the hearts of the people and the nobles. The ruin of the impoverished land, the subversion of right, the danger of property, a revolt in Ireland, the arming of the nobles in self-defence; all these indications allow us to observe in the first two acts the growing seed of revolution which the misled king had scattered. The prognostication of the fall of Richard II. is read by the voice of the people in the common signs of all revolutionary periods (Act II. sc. 4):—

> Rich men look sad, and ruffians dance and leap,—
> The one, in fear to lose what they enjoy,
> The other, to enjoy by rage and war.

Beyond the scattered touches and the insinuations which denote the inability of the king, and his wavering between unseasonable power and weakness, the poet has chosen only one event for greater dramatic prominence, and with this the catastrophe of Richard's fate is united, namely, the knightly quarrel between Bolingbroke and Norfolk with which the play begins. Coleridge said of this scene that it seems introduced in order beforehand to depict the characters of Richard and Bolingbroke, and Courtenay was even bold enough to think it was only introduced because Shakespeare found it in the chronicle. But this was not the method of Shakespeare's writing. Subsequently in Henry IV. (Part II. Act IV. sc. 1) he has abundantly expressed in the plainest language that he began with this scene because it was the beginning of all the sufferings which fell upon King Richard and afterwards upon his dethroners. Norfolk's son there says:

> O, when the king did throw his warder down,
> His *own* life hung upon the staff he threw;
> Then threw he down himself: and all their lives,
> That by indictment, or by dint of sword,
> Have since miscarried under Bolingbroke.

At all events, the scene, however necessary in itself, certainly serves essentially to place in opposition to each other, in their first decisive collision, the two main characters, Richard and Bolingbroke, the declining king yet in his power and glory, and the rising one in his misfortune and banishment. In his accusation of Norfolk, Bolingbroke besets the king remotely with hostile designs. The guilt of Gloster's death rests in the public opinion upon the king and his associates; subsequently Aumerle emerges as the immediate instrument; the guilt of having known it and concealed it falls upon Norfolk alone, a guilt of which he accuses himself; but the popular hatred turns upon him as upon the king. Bolingbroke, as we learn expressly in the second part of Henry IV. (Act IV. sc. 1), uses this circumstance to nourish the hatred and to draw upon himself the favour of the people, whilst he exhibits the Lancastrians honourably solicitous about a sacred family matter. He knows that Norfolk is not guilty of the death of Gloster; but, brave as he is politic, he freely ventures to propose the judgment of God, for he removes in him the single powerful support of the king, and at the same time the enemy of his own family. The survivors of the murdered Gloster spur on the Lancastrians to revenge, their

own security being concerned; the old Gaunt indeed commits vengeance to God, but his son Bolingbroke holds it far more certain if it is in his own human hand. The venerable old man, whom Shakespeare invests with riper years than history does, has transmitted to his son the elements which are blended together in his deeply reserved character. The hoary hero has borne in his heart the welfare of his fatherland, and his patriotic feelings obtain so much in his dying hour over his fidelity as a subject, that in words of the greatest enthusiasm for his glorious country he cuttingly reproaches the sinful Richard with what he has done with this 'demi-Paradise.' Sorrow for the country, and sorrow for his banished son, hurried him to the grave. Mingled with his patriotic feeling we see family feeling and self-love; both are also strong in the son. The son's far-stretching domestic policy accompanies and determines his whole life; his patriotic feeling breaks forth in the touching lament on his banishment, which justly has been called not only very beautiful, but very English. To both these traits is joined that diplomatic cunning which lies in the very recesses of his nature, and is therefore concealed without difficulty. This, too, the son appears to have inherited from his father; for shrewdness of purpose cannot be more delicately coupled with magnanimity than in the old Gaunt, who, in the council of state, gives his vote for the banishment of his son, which subsequently breaks his heart, in the idea of moving the rest to a milder judgment by his own too severe sentence. Similar in the deep reserve of his character is the delineation which Shakespeare has given of the son, who in one touch alone, in Richard II., appears without a mask, and who in all others, throughout the three plays, remains a riddle even to the attentive reader, until at length the last hour of life elicits a confession to his son. The same mysterious obscurity marks even the commencement scene between Bolingbroke and Norfolk. We have just intimated the designs and motives which actuate the former, but we have gathered them from subsequent disclosures; in the moment of action it is not clear at what he is aiming, and Norfolk's bearing increases the obscurity. The voice of innocence and honour speaks in him mostly in his voluntary confessions, and no less so in his strong appeal to his fidelity towards the king. It goes so far that he does not attempt to raise the veil from the misdeed of which he is accused, not even after the king's sentence of a dateless banishment has fallen on him 'all unlooked for,' when he hoped

for other reward than this disgrace. The king, too, condemns him, we likewise learn at the end of Henry IV. (Part II. Act IV. sc. 1), against his will, because of the general feeling against him, but the enthusiasm of popular favour was already directed to Bolingbroke, who at his departure behaves to the multitude as a condescending prince. The weak Richard, who Norfolk predicts will rue this deed, ignobly banishes for a lifetime the man whom he loves, and who would have been his most faithful support, and for a few years the other whom he hates, whose ambitious thoughts he fears, and whose banishment he has in his heart faithlessly resolved as limitless. He disturbs the combat between the two, whose peace he fears still more: he strikes his enemy and provokes him without making him harmless, and displays the helplessness of a man of a troubled conscience, who knows not the right occasion for mildness or severity. The chronicle sums up the faults of his government in these words: he showed too great kindness to his friends, too great favour to his enemies. Both are just. But in this case he shows in his severity towards his friend that he is inconsistent moreover, and he allows himself to be influenced by the power of opinion in an unessential point, when he neglected to attend to it in an essential one.

Fully in the sense of the sentence quoted from the chronicle Shakespeare draws the political moral from Richard's rule in the garden scene (Act. III. sc. 4) with its simple allegory. The wise gardener cares to give 'supportance to the bending twigs, which like unruly children make their sire stoop with oppression of their prodigal weight;' he cuts off the heads of too fast-growing sprays, that look too lofty on the commonwealth; he roots up the noisome weed. Richard, who had not observed the first of these rules in his jealousy of Gloster, who had neglected the second in his too great favour to Bolingbroke, and the third in his too great kindness to his parasites, Bagot and Bushy, now sees the fall of the leaves; another roots up the weeds 'that his broad-spreading leaves did shelter, that seemed in eating him to hold him up.' Had he cherished and nurtured his kingdom as the gardeners did their garden, he would have treated the great as they did their trees, wounding the bark at times to prevent the too luxuriant growth; he would have lopped away the superfluous branches, and thus he might have tasted and enjoyed their fruits and retained his crown.

Instead of this he did everything which could forfeit his

crown. We have seen the king's unadvised conduct in the quarrel between Bolingbroke and Norfolk. Hardly is this dispute settled than the old Gaunt dies: the Irish revolt demands a remedy; the extravagant prince has no money; he now seizes the Lancastrian property, which kindles even the good-natured York, indolent and rest-loving as he is. Richard goes in person to Ireland, and leaves behind him the irritated York, the weakest whom he could choose, as governor of England. Instantly the banished Bolingbroke seizes the occasion to return to the kingdom thus vacated, under the pretext of taking possession of his lawful inheritance. The apprehensive nobles, the Percys, join themselves to him; the miserable friends of the king give up their cause at once as lost; the helpless York goes over. When Richard returns from Ireland he possesses no more of the kingdom than his right to it. He persuades himself, though he is far from convinced of it, that with this right he has everything. He comes back from Ireland conscience-stricken, foreboding, paralysed, and inactive. With his wonted enthusiasm, when he again sets foot on English ground, he hopes that the 'earth shall have a feeling, and the stones prove armed soldiers, ere her native king shall falter under foul rebellious arms.' He buries himself in poetical and religious consolation, and intrenches himself behind his divine right and authority: 'not all the water in the rough rude sea can wash the balm from an anointed king;' the breath of worldly men cannot depose the deputy elected by the Lord. He builds upon this, that God and Heaven who guard the right have for every man of Bolingbroke's 'in heavenly pay a glorious angel' for him. He compares his kingly dignity to the sun, in whose absence robbers range abroad, but before his fiery rise in the east they tremblingly escape. Soon, however, the poet, referring silently to this image, exhibits him in opposition to the robber Bolingbroke, and this latter himself compares him in a similar manner to the sun emerging from the east, Act. III. sc. 3 (in many editions the passage is placed in the lips of York); but 'the envious clouds' dim the kingly aspect, and 'stain his track,' and are not so quickly dispersed as Richard imagined. Just while he is boasting so warmly of the assistance of Heaven, the tidings come that not alone no angels stand in readiness for him, but that even men are deserting him. Then suddenly his confidence in his good right forsakes him. He calls upon his name and his majesty, but on a new message of misfortune his courage breaks

down even to abdication. Once more subsequently he asserts to Northumberland his divine right, and declares that no human hand can seize his sacred sceptre without robbery and violence. But the blessing of Heaven is now visibly on the side of power; he whom the people uphold stands more surely than the anointed of God.

Shakespeare writes here an immortal lesson upon the royalty of God's grace and the law of inviolability. His ground is here also that two-sided one of entire impartiality and candour to which we unweariedly point, as to the greatest characteristic of his extraordinary mental superiority. He places his opinion chiefly in the mouth of the Bishop of Carlisle, the grand type of genuine loyalty, who stands faithfully by the side of the lawful king, without concealing from him the stern voice of truth; who defies the unlawful usurper in the public assembly, but still elicits, even from the latter, true honour, favour, and esteem. Absorbed in his meditations upon show and reality, upon which we see Shakespeare brooding throughout this period of his life, he cannot regard the halo of divine right as the characteristic of royalty. No inviolability can protect the anointed head if it render itself unworthy of the divine possession; no legitimacy and no balm can absolve the ruler from his duties to the land of his care! Every vocation would appear to our poet of God, and with the vocation every duty. The fulfilment of duty is even the king's first condition of stability; by his neglect of it he forfeits possession and right; by this he loses himself, his inner dignity, his consecration, and his power. Thus Henry IV. distinctly tells his son that, unbridled and self-forgetful as he then was, he was only 'the shadow of succession;' that the honourable Percy, though a rebel, deserved rather to be the heir. Dutiful illegality is compared with duty-forgetting legitimacy, and is placed above it by the man who had once elevated himself by it, and who would now secure his legality by the fulfilment of duty. By accurately comparing this play with his King John, we gain fresh light as to Shakespeare's true intention. The usurper John maintains the crown by good and bad means, so long as he retains his power and confidence, and so long as he abstains from wicked deeds and useless cruelty, and is thoroughly English-minded; as soon as he descends from his royal duty and sells England he loses himself and his crown. He, the usurper, differs not from the lawful Richard, who in the same way let the land by lease, and, giving up his duty, gave up himself also. It

belongs essentially to this kingly duty that the prince, if he will secure his own right, must defend and protect the right of others. The peculiar right of the king is not esteemed by Shakespeare more sacred than any other; these views took deeper root in England from the period of Shakespeare and the Dutch Republic, till Milton, in his 'Defensio pro Populo,' enforced them with marked emphasis. As soon as Richard had touched the inheritance of Lancaster, he had placed in his hands, as it were, the right of retaliation. The indolent York thus speaks to him immediately:—

> Take from time his rights;
> Let not *to-morrow* then ensue to-day;
> Be not thyself, for how art thou a king,
> But by fair sequence and succession?

He tells him that he 'plucks a thousand dangers on his head,' that he loses 'a thousand well-disposed hearts,' and that he 'pricks his tender patience to those thoughts, which honour and allegiance cannot think.' To this kingly duty there belongs, moreover, not only the absence of all those vices resulting from a weak love of pleasure by which Richard is ruined, but in their place must appear the virtue of energy, which is the first honour even of the common man. Heaven alone helps us, says Carlisle to Richard, when we embrace his means. And Salisbury enforces upon Richard the great lesson to be taken from the precipitation of revolutionary times:—

> One day too late, I fear, my noble lord,
> Hath clouded all thy happy days on earth;
> To-day, to-day, unhappy day, too late,
> O'erthrows thy joys, friends, fortune, and thy state.

At this warning he rouses himself, though the arousing is now too late. Before, every claim upon his manliness from Aumerle and Carlisle, and every reproach of his tardiness, had been in vain; he was absorbed in himself, and had revelled in his misfortune as before in his prosperity. Thus even his wife shames him when she finds him also deposed in intellect: she would like to see him like the 'lion, dying' that with rage 'thrusteth forth his paw, and wounds the earth,' but he, 'pupil-like, takes his correction mildly,' and teaches resignation to his wife, whose lips this lesson would have better suited. The weakness and guilt which cause revolutions unexpectedly to

prosper are depicted by the poet in a masterly manner; and in this play he unrolls before us in succession the spectacle of the powers at work during such a period of revolution—a picture scarcely to be fathomed in its grandeur and depth. For no play requires to be read so often as this, and in such close connection with the succeeding ones, in order that it may be thoroughly understood. Unadorned, and without brilliancy of matter, it yet all the more richly rewards patient industry. To analyse the contents of the whole four plays in a narrative which should exhibit the underlying motive entirely in Shakespeare's sense would be a comprehensive work, and one of extraordinary fulness. Whoever has read them from the beginning of this Richard to the close of Henry V., with conscientious reflection upon every single point, feels truly as if he had passed through an entire world.

The poet, who has not allowed us fully to know the young king in his prosperity, unfolds his character the more fascinatingly and minutely in his misfortune. As soon as with Bolingbroke's landing the turning point in his fortune has arrived, at the very conjuncture at which we should have wished to see the powerful ruler, there stands conspicuously before us the kindly human nature, which was before obscured in prosperity and mirth, but which even now is accompanied by weakness and want of stability, the distinguishing feature of his character. He has always needed props, and strong props he has not endured; he had sought them in climbing plants, which had pulled himself to the ground; Gaunt and Norfolk he had alienated. For this reason at the first moment of misfortune he falls past recovery. As soon as the first intelligence of the defection of his people arrives he is pāle and disheartened; at the second message, which threatens him with a new evil, he is submissive, and ready for abdication and death. When Aumerle reminds him of his father York he rouses himself once more, but as soon as he hears that even this last prop is broken, he curses his cousin for having led him forth 'of that sweet way he was in to despair;' he renounces every comfort, every act; he orders his troops to be discharged; capable of no further effort he will be reminded of none, and himself removes every temptation to it. A highly poetic brilliancy is cast upon the scenes of the humiliation and ruin of the romantic youth, whose fancy rises in sorrow and misfortune to a height which allows us to infer the strength of the intoxication with

which he had before plunged into pleasure. The power which at that time had carried him beyond himself, turns now with fearful force within, and the pleasure-loving man now finds enjoyment in suffering and sorrow, and a sweetness in despair. He calls himself at first the slave of a 'kingly woe;' subsequently on the contrary, deprived of his throne, he will remain king of his griefs. The words and predictions of the basely injured Gaunt are now to be fulfilled upon the insulter of the dying man. That sentence finds its truth in Richard:—

> Woe doth the heavier sit
> Where it perceives it is but faintly borne.

True in him is the word,

> Light vanity, insatiate cormorant,
> Consuming means, soon preys upon itself.

Richard marvelled in Gaunt's dying scene (Act II. sc. 1) how the lips of the sick can play with words, but in the deathly sickness of his *own* misery he learns how to fall still deeper into this play of words and speculative thought. At the very first, in the beginning of his sufferings, he broods upon thoughts of graves and death; he wishes to let the fate of all fallen kings pass before his mind, and then (as if the words of the dying Gaunt were in his thoughts, when he said to him that a 'thousand flatterers' sit within the small compass of his crown, wasting the land) he pictures to himself the image of the crown in sad contrast to his present position, as if within its hollow temples the antic Death kept his court, allowing the weaver of the crown 'a breath, a little scene to monarchise.' When he afterwards appears before his enemies (Act III. sc. 3), a paroxysm of his kingly fancy exhibits him to the sneaking Northumberland with a show of power; indeed, this was now the moment for arresting with dignity and courage the yet undefined plot. But before Bolingbroke had declared his intentions—at a time when, even in the presence of the weak York, no one might omit the royal title before Richard's name without apology—suddenly and without any cause his wings hang wearied, and he himself speaks of the subjection of the king; and, as he sees Aumerle weep, his lively fancy at once runs away with him to the borders of insanity: his words remind us in these scenes of the passionate melancholy of Lear which is the prelude to his madness. He asks whether they

shall 'play the wantons with their woes, and make some pretty match with shedding tears? as thus;—to drop them still upon one place, till they have fretted a pair of graves.' Even here, it seems, we cannot help looking back shudderingly from all this wretchedness and misery to that vain intercourse and waste of time in which Richard formerly lived with his companions. The play on words and the conceits in these scenes have been censured as inappropriate, but nowhere are they inserted with so deep and true a purpose; those whose whole intercourse consisted formerly in raillery and quibbling, naturally speculate immoderately in such a position, and delight in exhausting an idea aroused by the force of circumstances. Richard remembers that he is talking but idly, and remarks that they mock at him; the worst is that Northumberland has heard his foolish words, and designates him to Bolingbroke as a frantic man. That which the rebels would not have ventured to demand, the childish man, whom the feeling of being forsaken has quite cast down, offers of himself to them; he himself first designates the danger which surrounds him, when in his half-insane words he calls Northumberland prince and Bolingbroke king; in the ears of all he gives himself and his inheritance into Bolingbroke's hands, even before any one had asked it. In the scene also of the deposition, which accords excellently with the nature of the king and is the crowning point of the characterisation, we hear him giving vent to beautiful poetic images upon his misfortune, and we see him burying himself in his sorrow with a kind of pleasure. He pictures to himself, as in a drama, the scene over which another would have passed quickly. Only when he is subjected to the indignity of reading his own indictment does his proud nature once again break out, and he perceives too late how miserably he had become a traitor to himself. Later too, when we see Richard on the way to prison and in prison, even in his resignation he is ever employed in picturing his painful condition to himself as still more painful; revelling, as it were, in his sorrow, and emptying the cup to the very dregs. He peoples the little space of his prison with his wild fancy, he studies how he may compare it to the world. An air of music drives him to reflect how he has here 'the daintiness of ear to check time broke in a disordered string,' whilst 'for the concord of his state and time he had no ear to hear his true time broke.' He wasted time, which now wastes him; and thus again in another melancholy simile he pictures

himself as a clock, which time had made out of himself. It is wise of the poet that out of the different stories of Richard's death he chose that which exhibits him to us at the end in honourable strength, after having allowed us also to perceive the attractive power of his amiability; it is therefore not without esteem that we take our leave of the commiserated man.

Richard himself awarded the crown to Bolingbroke when he said to him: 'They well deserve to *have*, that know the strongest and surest way to *get*.' But this can in no wise justify the usurper's attack on the throne. An historical, a political, as well as a divine curse, rests upon the deed, which, if not revenged upon the perpetrator himself, reacts upon his house. If God does not protect the sinful king, He protects not therefore the sinful deeds of his adversaries. Richard and Carlisle utter rather the prediction of punishment: God shall muster 'armies of pestilence' which shall strike the children of rebels, yet unborn; for this assault by the unholy hand of the subject against the king, the land was to be called 'the field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls,' and 'the woefullest division' was to visit it. This curse was fulfilled first in those who had carried out Bolingbroke's schemes: 'The love of wicked friends,' Richard warns Northumberland,

> converts to fear;
> That fear, to hate; and hate turns one or both
> To worthy danger and deserved death.

And so it was; Northumberland himself, like the characters in Richard III., draws down the fulfilment of the curse upon himself with the words: 'Thy guilt be on my head.' The new king meets the vengeance of Heaven subsequently in the rebellion of the Percys, his supporters, and in the civil war, which does not allow him to succeed in the longed-for expiation of his crime, a crusade to the Holy Land. Still more closely does retribution meet him in his torment of heart, fearing from his own son the same fate which he had brought upon Richard, and fearing for him the same end that had befallen Richard, because as Prince of Wales he was leading the same unrestrained life. The good kingly use which Henry makes of his usurped crown does not reconcile Heaven so much as that it checks its vengeance; just as on the contrary in Richard the bad use had destroyed the good right. He sanctifies the dignity attained, he confirms it as a more sure possession, and he transmits it to his son, who

adorns it with new glory. But let one unworthy or even weak ruler come into the line, like Henry VI., and quickly will that curse discharge itself upon him; and this more terribly than upon Richard, as the same reproaches must press more heavily upon the usurper than upon the lawful ruler.

But in what does the poet exhibit that good use of the crown which we extol in Bolingbroke? The whole of Henry IV. must give an answer to this question; but even in Richard II. the reply is found. His whole path to the kingdom is a royal path, and scarcely has he reached it than he shows by the most striking contrast the difference between the king by nature and the king by mere inheritance. Before, when banished by Richard he had left the country, he left it like a king. After the death of his father, and the plunder of his house, he returns unhesitatingly from banishment, in defiance of his sentence, and lands poor and helpless on the forbidden shore. The discontented Percys, in league with him before his landing, hasten to him; the steward of Worcester does so, not out of love for him, but for his outlawed brother. On the journey which Bolingbroke has to make with his friends, he flatters them with fair words, and entertains them with sweet discourse, but not so as to sell himself to these helpers, upon whom at the time he wholly depends, as Richard did to his favourites, who even wholly depended upon *him*. The possessionless man, who at the time has only thanks and promises for the future to give, is in earnest in his gratitude, without intending subsequently when he is king to concede to the helpers to the throne a position above the throne. The arrogance with which Northumberland—'the ladder wherewithal the mounting Bolingbroke ascended the throne'—is on a future day to appear against him, is fully foretold in that display of it with which he prepared the way for him to the throne. He and his followers, in their active eagerness, alertness, and officiousness, form a contrast to Richard's, for the most part, inactive faint-hearted flatterers: they are the willing myrmidons of the rebellion who urge Bolingbroke as quickly forward as the followers of Richard check his better nature. It is Northumberland, now smooth and flexible, and now rough and unfeeling, who first speaks of Richard with the omission of his title; he it is who repeats more solemnly and forcibly the oath of Bolingbroke that 'his coming is but for his own;' he it is who, in the scene of deposition, maliciously torments King Richard with the reading of his accusation; and he it is who would arbitrarily arrest the

noble Carlisle for high treason after the outbreak of his feelings of right and his civic fidelity. But how noble throughout does Bolingbroke appear, compared to this base instrument of his plans: he still humbly kneels to the poor Richard, and at least preserves the show of decorum, while Northumberland must be reminded of his bending knee by his excited king; he forbids the malicious tormentor, in the deposition scene, any further urging; he pardons the arrested Carlisle, whose invectives had been hurled in his very presence. He came before Richard prepared for a stormy scene, ready for a part of feigned humility; but when Richard himself gives him the crown, it is perhaps only another kingly trait in his nature; it is certainly the act of a statesman, contrasting him far more advantageously than detrimentally with the tardy, self-forgetful king, that he grasps the occasion so readily. No less skilfully had he, it must be admitted, prepared for it. Even before it becomes a personal question between him and Richard, he had begun, according to Percy's account, in the *feeling of his greatness*, to step somewhat higher than his original vow. He began to reform edicts and decrees, to abolish abuses, to win men by good measures and actions; he eradicated those hated favourites, he assumed to himself a protectorate, and accustomed the people to see kingly acts emanating from him before he was a king. In this manner, when wish and capacity, the desire and the gift for ruling, were evidenced in him, the insurrection was already at work before it showed itself in its true aspect. Cold and considerate compared to his fanciful predecessor, a profound statesman compared to the romantic and poetic king, a quick horseman, spurring the heavy, over-burdened Richard, bearing the misfortune of banishment with manly composure, and easing his nature by immediate search for redress, while Richard gives way at the mere approach of misfortune, this man appears throughout as too unequal an adversary to Richard for the good right on the one side to stand its ground against the superior gifts on the other. If, intoxicated by his first success, he had not so far lost himself as to tread the path of John and Richard III., and to hint at the murder of the king (though only remotely and indirectly to his subsequent sorrow and repentance), we should consider Bolingbroke's path to the throne not only guiltless but justified. His first appearance on the throne, in any case, casts Richard's knightly endowments thoroughly into the shade. The poet has here made excellent

use of the corresponding history. The commencement scene, which essentially exhibits to us Richard's conduct as a sovereign, has its counterpart in the fourth act, where Shakespeare exemplifies Bolingbroke's dissimilar conduct in a similar position. Aumerle is accused by four nobles of the murder of Gloster, as once Bolingbroke himself had accused Norfolk, whom he now wishes honourably to recall and to reinstate in his possessions. Only one takes the side of Aumerle, and this is the half brother of King Richard—a suspicious security. Bolingbroke could have suffered Aumerle, the most avowed favourite of Richard, to fall by the sword of the four accusers, and could have thus removed an enemy, but he does it not. Yet more: a newly projected plot of Aumerle's is discovered to the king; the father himself is the accuser of the son; the father himself protests earnestly against his pardon; but the yet unconfirmed, illegitimate sovereign scorns to shed the blood of relatives—a deed which cost Richard nothing. He pardons him; not out of weakness, for he punishes the other conspirators with death; he pardons him from humane and kindly motives, and schools him into a hero and a patriot. He does as that gardener would have had the lawful king do; with wise discretion he governs with mercy and justice, mildness and severity. And, at the same time, he behaves with that sure power and superiority which permits him to jest in this very scene, and to act with that easy humour towards the zealous mother of York, when he has just discovered a conspiracy against his life.

The group of characters in Richard II. is arranged very simply in harmony with the suggestions we have offered. In contrast to the incapable legitimate king and his helpless inactive followers stands the rising star of the thorough statesman-like and royal usurper and his over-active adherents. In the midst of the struggle between right and merit stands Carlisle, as a man of genuine loyalty, knowing no motive but fidelity and duty, not concealing the truth from the lawful king, and ruining himself in opposing unsparingly the shield of right against the usurper who raises himself to power. Contrasted with him is the old York, whom Coleridge, in consequence of an incorrect apprehension of the character, has placed in a false opposition to Richard. The true picture of such an agitated age would be wanting if this character were absent. He is the type of political faintheartedness and neutrality, at a time when partisanship is a duty, and of that cowardly loyalty which turns to the

strong and powerful. When Richard is still in his full power, he considers he has gone too far in extolling to the young king the virtues of his father. When Richard seizes the Lancastrian lands, his natural sense of right, and his anxiety respecting his own property, urge him to utter impressive warnings, but when the king makes him as a 'just' man his governor in England, he allows himself to be appeased. Bolingbroke lands, and York sees through his project, and warns him not to take what he should not; his integrity even here shows him the path which his weakness suffers him not to follow. He would like to serve the king and to discharge his duty to his lord, but he thinks he has also a duty of kinship and conscience respecting Bolingbroke's lawful claims to his inheritance. That he stood for the moment in the place of the king he heeds not. Helpless as to action, he loses his head in unutterable perplexity, but not his character. He resolves to remain neutral. He sees the finger of God in the desertion of the people, and lets it be; for Richard he has tears, few words, and no deeds. With loyalty such as this countries go to ruin, while they prosper at usurpations such as Bolingbroke's. But that this weakness of the weak can amount to a degree in which it becomes the most unnatural obduracy, and in which the cruelty of the usurper is guiltless when compared with it, has been displayed by Shakespeare in a truly masterly manner when he suffers York to accuse his own son of high treason and to urge his death with pertinacity. He goes so far as to wish that the king may 'ill thrive, if he grant any grace.' In this trait conscientiousness and fidelity are mingled indistinguishably with the fear of exposure and suspicion. Such is servile loyalty; under the rule of the weak it is weak, and affords but a frail support; under that of the strong it is strong, and is an efficient and trustworthy power.

HENRY IV.

PART I.

The two parts of Henry IV., the latter of which was completed before the 25th February, 1598, are a direct continuation of Richard II.; the first embraces a period of only ten months (between the battles of Holmedon, 14th September, 1402, and of Shrewsbury, 21st July, 1403), the second comprises the interval from that time till Henry's death, nine years after. In both these plays Shakespeare follows Holinshed's Chronicle, even in its errors. Thus he has allowed himself to be misled by it into blending in his Edmund Mortimer two persons of that name, uncle and nephew. In the history of the revolt of the Percys, Shakespeare with wonderful skill faithfully uses the historical material, even in the most minute touches; the comic and serious parts of Prince Henry's youthful extravagances, and his quarrel with his father, are worked out with poetic freedom from a few vague indications in the Chronicle; nor would the poet have suffered these indications to excite his suspicion or disgust had he known the critical writings of Luders and Tyler, who in our own day have sought to set aside the reproach of the youthful sins of Henry V. The hints in the Chronicle, which appear unquestionable even to the eye of the historian, had been already dramatically used before Shakespeare in an older play, written between 1580 and 1588, entitled 'The Famous Victories of Henry V.;' it is a rough piece, one of the most worthless historical plays of the pre-Shakespeare period; and Shakespeare could have borrowed nothing from it but a few isolated externals. Of Henry's youthful tricks the Chronicle affords no particulars beyond the story that the prince once gave the Lord Chief Justice a box on the ear and was arrested for it, and that at another time he went to court in a dress stuck over with pins, to signify that he went on thorns as long

as the crown was not his. Both these stories [illegible] admitted, both has Shakespeare rejected; t[illegible] delicately shifted behind the scene, the other ab[illegible] has changed into an action full of pathos and cha[illegible]eristic truth. Beyond this, the older play has not afford[illegible] our poet anything respecting the wild scenes of Henry's you[illegible]ful companions but a hint not to neglect these historical stories, capable as they are of popular treatment, and also a few names, such as the tavern at Eastcheap, Gadshill, Ned, and Sir John Oldcastle. The latter was, as Halliwell has minutely proved,[1] originally the name of the fat knight in Shakespeare. We infer this indeed from occasional intimations in the play itself; the prince's address to Falstaff, 'my old lad of the castle,' can only thus be explained, and in the quarto edition of the second part the prefix *Old* (Oldcastle) is still left before a speech of Falstaff's. The matter becomes a certainty from a quotation of the actor Nathaniel Field, who must have been best informed on this point.[2]

We mention this thus fully, because with this mere name circumstances are linked which furnish evidence of the great sensation which Henry IV. caused at its appearance. In the series of historical plays, Shakespeare takes the same leap in this piece as in the series of love plays he does in Romeo and Juliet. But the effect must have been incomparably greater. For Romeo is a work the enjoyment of which was limited to those of Shakespeare's select public who possessed the greatest refinement of feeling; but in Henry IV. the richest entertainment was afforded for spectators of every class. Shakespeare has indeed scarcely written another play of such fulness and diversity in fascinating and sharply delineated characters, bearing at the same time such a native stamp, and interwoven with a subject so national, and so universally interesting—a play, in fact, of such manifold and powerful force of attraction. When Henry IV. first appeared, an immoderate delight must have seized the spectators of every nature and of every position; a tumultuous joy must have been its effect; for the genius of a nation has never appeared on any stage in such bright cheer-

[1] Halliwell on the 'Character of Falstaff,' 1841.

[2] In his play, 'Amends for Ladies,' printed 1618, he says: 'Did you not see the piece in which the fat knight, named Oldcastle, told you truly what was honour?' with evident allusion to the famous soliloquy in Henry IV. (I. Act v. sc. 3).

[redacted]e same time, in such quiet modesty, as in these [redacted]he moment of their appearance the form of st[redacted]tions and the act and manners of the poet were at once c[redacted]ged in England; not till the pioneering genius works with [redacted]ch dexterity and ease that the labour of maturity is no long[redacted]r remarked in his productions, and his art no longer appears art, does he attract by the appearance of facility a crowd of imitators—and this is first to be said of this play of Shakespeare's. From this time appears that train of prolific poets by profession, Ben Jonson, Marston, Thomas Heywood, Middleton, Chapman, and others, while previously all had been fragmentary effort, timid essay, and dilettantism. Now there appeared in the plays a fresh free touch of life, while before, even in the works of the unshackled Greene and Marlowe, the labour of art and learning had been too evident. Dramatic poetry now seemed to have loosened its tongue or to have grown its wings. The scenes from low life attracted spectators as well as poets; vulgar reality, and unfortunately also real vulgarity, became the character of stage poetry; nor was our poet accountable for this unhappy turn, for it was just on this point that he laboured with the highest moral severity. In the first place, all the comic characters of the play were imitated and repeated. Shallow occurs in his own name as a constant character in later dramas; the swaggerer Pistol is imitated times out of number; and Chapman says, in 1598, that the word 'swaggerer' itself was a new term that had been so quickly received because it was created by a natural prosopopœia without etymology or derivation. The character of the stage marvel Falstaff or Oldcastle was copied by Ben Jonson in that of Tucca in his 'Poetaster,' and by Fletcher in his 'Cacafogo.' But not on the stage alone did this character cause such a deep agitation and effect; the phenomenon was so extraordinary that it gained ground and called forth a vast tumult in families and parties. Shakespeare found the name of John Oldcastle in the beforementioned older play of Henry V.; in the Chronicle he found a John Oldcastle, who was page to the Duke of Norfolk who plays a part in Richard II.; and this, according to Shakespeare, *his* Falstaff (Oldcastle) had been in his youth. When the poet wrote his Henry IV. he knew not who this Oldcastle was, whom he had rendered so distinct with the designation as Norfolk's page; he was a Lord Cobham, who had perished as a Lollard and Wickliffite in the persecution of the church

> Thou hid'st a thousand daggers in thy thoughts;
> Which thou hast whetted on thy stony heart,
> To stab at half an hour of my life.

In his son's life he sees the proof that he loved him not, and in the hour of death he perceives the endeavour to assure him of it. When the son's explanation quiets and convinces him, and lightens his dying hour, the deep dissembler at length unveils himself, and acknowledges by what by-paths and indirect, crooked ways he had attained the crown. Shortly before, with equal appeal to God, he had sworn (Part II. Act III. sc. 1) that necessity alone had 'compelled him and greatness to kiss.' In conversation with Warwick he had then protested that at the time when Richard predicted the division between the Percys and himself he had no design upon the crown. Interpreters point out this as a forgetfulness on the part of the poet, who allowed Richard to utter this prophecy when Henry was already king; although with the unusual depth which marked Shakespeare's delineation of this whole character, his intention might have been to show rather how, in the moment of his sickness, the liar and dissembler loses his true remembrance, and plainly and by proof betrays his very guilt in the protestations of his innocence.

From this analysis of Bolingbroke's character we perceive the political relation and bearing of Henry IV. to Richard II.; but from the profound treatment of the principal characters these pieces are raised from the sphere of political historical plays into that of the true ethical dramas, the freer creations of Shakespeare; beyond the political theme of the pieces there appears also a moral centre of thought, as we perceived above in Richard III. We arrive at this moral centre of the play by attentively considering the principal figures, Henry Percy and Prince Henry of Wales.

Shakespeare makes Henry Percy, in order that he may obtain a more complete contrast to the prince, of the same age as the latter, although historically he is far rather contemporary with King Henry, and twenty years older than the prince. He is the soul of the undertaking against the king, and the brilliant figure in the centre of the rebels, extorting love and admiration even from his enemies. Never was a more living character delineated in poetry; ballads designed to sing his glory might have borrowed their boldest traits and images from this drama. There is, too, scarcely any part more grateful to the actor;

Betterton, the cleverest actor of the old English school, hesitated whether he should himself choose Percy, or the favourite of all parts, Falstaff. This doubt would hardly be conceivable to an actor in Germany who knew himself as well qualified for Falstaff as Betterton was, because it is only a people accustomed to action who can estimate this character as it deserves. For Henry Percy is the ideal of all genuine and perfect manliness, and of that active nature which makes the man a man. In jesting exaggeration the prince well characterises him with the one touch, that he kills six or seven dozen of Scots at a breakfast, and says to his wife, 'Fye upon this quiet life! I want work!' As a model of genuine chivalry, Shakespeare has delineated the lion-hearted youth with characteristics as refined as they are great. He gives him the name of the war-god; report compares his victories to Cæsar's: Achilles' motto is his: 'the time of life is too short to spend that shortness basely;' and when he has fallen, Henry says over his grave what so often has been said of Alexander:—

> When that this body did contain a spirit,
> A kingdom for it was too small a bound;
> But now, two paces of the vilest earth
> Is room enough.

Still young, as the poet makes him, he has thrice beaten the Scottish Douglas, and heaped upon his own head all the enemy's glory; he has at length gained immortal honour at Holmedon, and by this has excited the envy of the king. A keen ambition spurs him on, like a proud horse, to suffer none to pass before him on his course of warlike and honourable action. At the bare mention of this subject his language at once assumes the ardent, exaggerated expression of a courage amounting to passion, and of an even ostentatious heroism. When he only forbodes a rival, as in the Prince, a grudging jealousy provokes him to the unknightly expression of a resolve, the execution of which would be impossible to him, and he declares that he would 'have him poisoned with a pot of ale!' When he hears of Henry's proud bearing before the battle of Shrewsbury, this jealousy urges him imprudently into the most dangerous actions. Danger has ever an alluring charm for him; when the goad of emulation is added to it, it decides him completely to venture on the unequal fight, and with the most painful impatience he leaves explanatory letters unread, and

every earnest appeal to his military talent, to his foresight, and to his honour unheeded. His courage makes him a sophist, just as his quick passion occasionally makes him a statesman—two capacities which lie in direct opposition to his soldierly nature. For his blood boils up easily and violently; a 'Hotspur,' ardent by nature, he is full of caprices, always occupied in mind, and thirsting after action; in this activity of life he is forgetful and absent, robbed of appetite by day and of sleep by night; his imagination is excitable and easily provoked, and in his irritation he is capable of passion, contradiction, and scorn towards all the world. In such moments his speech falters, and vents itself with stuttering rapidity, but the defect becomes him so that the young imitate it in him as an excellence. In repose, and left to himself, he is pliable and yielding like a lamb in his true, unsuspicious nature. In private with Glendower he allows him for nine hours to entertain him with the devil's names, although it disgusts him; in the presence of others he crosses him with derision and reproach. Opposed, he covets a little piece of land, which he would gladly yield to a yielding claimant. Accused by the king of having refused the prisoners made at Holmedon, he excuses his refusal of the demand; but when the king gives him the lie, and threatens him, he is at once no longer master of his pride and anger. With his heated imagination, which the mere idea of a great exploit carries beyond the bounds of patience and reflection, he utters presagingly bold schemes of revolt; and when his spirit is excited into violent passion, the political Worcester suggests his long-matured plans against Henry to the 'quick conceiving discontents' of the hot-blooded youth. This blind passion throws the spotless hero into traitorous connections, it leads the resolute man into league with the undecided and the weak, the warrior and soldier into schemes with artful diplomatists, the man of valour and fidelity into alliance with traitors and cowards, and the man imprudent himself into undertakings imprudently designed. And when candid advisers suspect these plans and his friends, the honest man bears ill-will against the honest counsellor, because he himself does not believe in dishonesty. This passionateness, this want of penetration and knowledge of human nature, prove the ruin of the trustful man; for the want of self-command, which leads him to immoderate ebullitions and arrogant blame, forms, in Worcester's opinion, the principal blemish in the extreme beauty of his

character. Beyond this, there is no ignoble vein in the man. Perfectly true and of a golden heart, far removed from all malice, inaccessible to cunning and deceit, his nature is utterly at variance with the vile and corrupt policy and diplomacy of the king. He is nettled and scourged with rods if he only hears of it; and when the king imputes to Mortimer the crime of having intentionally given himself up as a prisoner to Glendower, his indignation bursts forth in his presence: 'never did base and rotten policy colour her working with such deadly wounds.' His utter aversion to all untruth renders him heartily angry at Glendower's whimsical bragging. He cannot listen to praise and flattery, and blame he cannot suppress, even if he should offend new and insecure friends by it. On such occasions he suffers his vehemence and roughness to be reproved, and scornfully blesses manners more refined and commended. An enemy to all affectation, to all show and vanity, he is an enemy also to all false, unmanly refinement. He would rather hear 'a dry wheel grate on an axle-tree' than mincing poetry; he would rather be 'a kitten, and cry—mew,' than be a ballad-monger; and music and singing he thinks 'the next way to turn tailor, or be red-breast teacher.' Averse to these tender arts, he is so also to all false sentimentality. The charming scene between him and his wife shows that he loves because he banters; no other expression for its love could this unaffected nature find. How could Ulrici imitate the absurd Horn in declaring that Percy's wife was only his chief servant? How can we reconcile it with Henry Percy's character to swear on horseback to his wife that he loves her infinitely, if these were only empty words to a servant? Such love rests closely and firmly on the certain superiority of the husband and on the golden confidence of the wife, who possesses the rare quality of understanding the fervour of her husband's love in his jests and banterings, and from whose remembrance this 'miracle of men' can never pass away. In short, to trace back this character, and indeed our two plays, to the point at which we started, we can only say that honour lives and moves in this man as in its own abode; it is the virtue of the soldier in contrast to the equivocal and diplomatic honour of the cabinet which distinguishes the king. The honourable Douglas renders homage to the Hotspur Percy as to 'the king of honour.' He is 'the theme of honour's tongue,' it is said, whilst dishonour stains the brow of Prince Henry. He will go through any

danger 'from the east unto the west, so honour cross it from the north to south.' It seems to him

> an easy leap,
> To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon;
> Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
> And pluck up drowned honour by the locks;
> So he, that doth redeem her thence, might wear,
> Without corrival, all her dignities!

The impatience of his ambition, and his jealousy of honour, is expressed in this, that he is on fire when he only hears Prince Henry praised. The Percys reflect with repentance on the mortification of Richard, the world's tongue rebukes them for the old misdeed, and the young hero especially wishes to wash away this stain from the honour of his house. The time serves, he thinks, to redeem banished honour; it seems to him intolerable to bear the outrage, and to be discarded and shaken off by him for whom the shame was undergone. In his ardour it is not possible for him to reflect that the means for this effacing of dishonour must heap new dishonour upon them, and that the motives are selfish. The revolt in league with enemies of the land for the purpose of dividing the kingdom, the 'ill-weaved ambition' which set it going, remains a blemish on his shield of honour, but the only one; and even this ignominy, says Prince Henry, shall sleep with him in the grave, and not be remembered in his epitaph. This conquest over his victor is made even in death by the honourable hero. He makes it also over the reader. This has been expressed by no one more significantly than by Hazlitt, who would not have been sorry if Northumberland had come in time, and had decided the battle at Shrewsbury in Percy's favour.

Great and admirable when considered by himself, Percy increases in greatness when we see him in the company of his fellow-conspirators. 'Could the world,' says Falstaff, 'pick out three such enemies again, as that fiend Douglas, that spirit Percy, and that devil Glendower?' But when we see Percy associated with the others, we perceive how high he stands *above* those whom Falstaff placed *beside* him. The Scottish Douglas is nearest to him; he has the bravest place in his heart's love, and Douglas on the other hand tells him that no man but him breathes so potent upon the earth whom he would not 'beard.' True like Percy, brave like him without consideration and caution, inaccessible like him to fear, he has

also somewhat of the national ostentation which is not foreign to Percy; their blustering mode of speaking is also altogether similar, the idea often being misty in its expression. But the intellectual height, the poetic enamel, that moral essence of chivalry, which ennoble Hotspur's character, are wanting to the dry Scot; and therefore the old enemy, after their first personal contact, submits readily to this sovereignty of mind, and implicitly acknowledges Percy to be the king of honour. His valour is rather of an instinctive character compared to that of Percy, which is excited by all the brilliant ideas of ambition; he is the Sickingen in the school of a Hutten.—Still further removed from Percy is the Welshman, Owen Glendower; without this counterpart, Percy would perhaps with his romantic valour and ostentation have appeared as a refined caricature; when this caricature is placed beside him in Owen, he modestly moves back to the level of human nature. Vanity excites the Welshman to all that Percy is impelled to do by honour and the noblest self-reliance; it produces even his bragging, while this flows with Percy from exaggerated ardour. A false show of honour urges Glendower indeed to adventurous deeds of war, but the reputation of natural strength is not sufficient for him; he aspires after the renown of miraculous abilities and faculties, he longs to see the superstitious world tremble before his greatness, and he boasts of commanding the powers of hell. In opposition to the deluding magician, Percy places his pride in modest truth; in contrast to the marvel-loving theories of the one, stands his plain rational theology; he calls his vain glory the 'unprofitable chat of a Welshman;' and how should his self-praise please the man who could not suffer even the commendation of another! Out of vanity Glendower unites to his valour learning and study, music and poetry—those arts of the muses which Percy considers unsuitable to the soldier; out of vanity, and a desire to have weight in everything, he is skilled in all the social and courtly arts which Percy despises. Percy is stung with impatience and pain in the scene in which Owen's daughter sings to Mortimer; such weakness and extravagant sentimentality are contrary to his nature, and the whole conduct is so far removed from the healthful relations between him and his wife. The unnaturalness of his union with dissimilar beings is felt indeed by his instinctive sensitiveness, yet he is not capable of bringing reflection to bear on this aversion, which might have warned him and inspired him with mistrust. 'Tell

truth,' he had said to Glendower, 'and shame the devil;' but Glendower feared the devil, and was untrue and unfaithful. Like Mortimer—who stands among all as an irresolute tool, as a pretender, who, on account of the loftiness of his aim, ought to feel the sharpest stimulus of honour, and who possesses not its smallest impulse—like Mortimer he is slowly induced to join the rebels at the place of meeting, and on the decisive day he comes not, being superstitiously 'o'erruled by prophecies.'—Still worse is it with Percy's own relations. His father Northumberland, smooth as ever, calm and coldly restrained, formed at most only to win a new member to the conspiracy, and not created to help in the work of arms, is in the decisive moment 'crafty sick;' he breaks his word, he remains causelessly and dishonourably behind, and thus infects the very life-blood of the enterprise. Thus the battle against the king could not be won, for on his side fought the noble Blunt and a host of others like him, who in royal disguise sacrificed themselves for their king! Yet, in spite of this, the bloody ruin of the conspirators would have been avoided, if Percy's uncle Worcester had not been still less true and honourable than his father Northumberland. He who had entangled the knot displays similar malice in its bloody solution. It is an historical fact that he forged the king's offer of mercy; in our play he fails to deliver the prince's challenge to Percy, which might have atoned for the quarrel with less blood, and in accordance with the prince's mind. Thus he draws his nephew at once into destruction and ignominy, while Percy's youth and ardour would have excused him in Henry's sight, and his childlike piety prevented his having even a remote presentiment as to the nature of his father and his uncle.

It would be difficult to any poet to produce a hero superior to this. But least of all should it appear that Shakespeare wished or ventured to place his Prince Henry before him. Thus at any rate it could not have appeared to those interpreters who discovered a kind of injustice and an inconsistency in Percy's fall through Henry, after the early relations between the two. His own father indeed calls the prince in contrast to that king of honour, almost a king of ignominy, and declares Percy more worthy of the throne than his own son! The prince, he asserts, in league with the low mob, is more dishonourably in war against the state than Percy! Ridiculing all knightly customs, he fights at tournaments with the glove

of base prostitutes on his spear! He has even laid hands on the Lord Chief Justice, and has been for this placed in confinement and expelled from the Privy Council! Where in such a man could lie the right and the talents to be lord over a hero so splendidly endowed as Percy, unless some accident of history or some inconceivable caprice on the part of the poet dictated such a conclusion, which seems ill to accord with the just laws of a well organised world, such as that into which we wish poetry to transport us.

The prince indeed in his first soliloquy announces to us that he is perfectly aware of the wild actions of his youth, and that he intends some day to throw off this loose behaviour, and to redeem time lost. Frivolity seems accompanied with prudence and reflection, and behind the mask of folly we seem to hear a wise man speaking. Let us attentively follow out this double part, in order that we may discover the true nature of this chameleon. For how easily might that soliloquy be imagined less strong and solemn than it is intended! Has not Franz Horn, after his fashion of seeing humour like Corporal Nym everywhere in Shakespeare, regarded even this soliloquy as mere irony on the part of the poet?

When we meet with the prince upon his first appearance, he is in friendly association with thieves and rogues; he is their protector and advocate, he screens their misdeeds with his dignity; he conceals and denies their persons, and himself assists at their robberies. But, on the other side, he compensates for the base trick by paying back the money taken with advantage, and he joins the base trick only when a mad trick accompanies it; he undertakes it for once, when a good joke is gained by it for ever.

For, indeed, to avoid a good joke is difficult to him. Of an excitable nature, laughter-loving, merry, unbridled, he gives way to a wild youthful love of liberty which Percy despises in him. The smallest occasion can stir up this merry mood in him, and once excited he is ready for the maddest pranks possible. He is considered by his father like King Richard, in whose company were 'shallow jesters and rash bavin wits;' and in the same way it is difficult for Henry, master as he is of quibbles and puns, to check a witty word on a good occasion. He has with refined cleverness selected a society in which all elements meet, and by mixture and contact with which a boundless material for mirth, raillery, and bantering is created. But if this unbridled conduct damps the hopes centred upon the prince, if his wildness may

be misconstrued, yet there are glimpses at times which show us that to him it is only a recreation and not a habit. The Chronicle also represents him as indulging in this propensity only in the intervals between warlike and serious action. Falstaff continues to trifle even in the battle, but not he; in the presence of his father he is grave and full of childlike devotion. It appears as if he only wanted, so long as there was time, to create an antidote to that conventional life and its poison, which is strongest on the throne; he vents himself in a youthful paroxysm over the commonplaceness of the vocation of his life. He may appear like the young Richard, but he does not perseveringly carry his mirthful frivolity into serious business, and he stands forth as a master in self-command, no trace of which is to be discovered in Richard's character. There might even be some prudent calculation mingled with the joviality of the Prince, to whom sedateness was not altogether foreign; 'for it is a thing,' says Bacon, 'political beyond imagination, to be able to pass readily from jest to earnest, from earnest to jest.' He seems to behave like a man who wishes to follow the wise maxim which the same Bacon has clothed in these words: 'whilst philosophers dispute whether all is to be referred to virtue or pleasure, gather thou the means for both.'

Richard II.'s intercourse was one with relatives and nobles, at least outwardly equal in birth. Prince Henry, on the contrary, roves about with men of the lowest class. It is not even the intellectual excellence of the wit which exclusively charms and attracts him. His game with the young drawer shows us his harmless delight even in the most innocent jokes; he roams about with vintners, with whom he assumes the greatest air of courtesy, so that Falstaff, compared to him, appears an insolent and proud fellow. This condescension is blamed by the king, whose art it was to 'show himself like a feast, seldom but sumptuous,' sparing of the courtesy which his son lavishes extravagantly. According to that soliloquy, however, the prince too seemed to act from a policy in no wise dissimilar. He wished to imitate the sun, which conceals itself behind the clouds that it may be more wanted and more wondered at; he indulges in his 'loose behaviour' upon the same principle of 'rare accidents,' only he seemed, if he did not presume too far, to wish to apply this principle as a great man. It was not his person, his robe of majesty, that was to form the 'rare accident,' the surprise, the sun-gleam, and the holiday, but his deeds.

As long as he was not directly called to these, he shunned not to turn from the artificial nature round the throne to the original characters and the natural creations of the lower classes. He takes pleasure in human nature in its bare condition and unvarnished form; poverty of mind and of the necessaries of life is a study for him; his plain homely nature, contrasted with Percy's knightly aristocratic bearing, is most at ease among the true-hearted fellows of Eastcheap, who call him a good boy, and tender him their service when he shall be King of England. Perhaps there is policy even in this, that he seeks to win the hearts of the people when so little reliance can be placed on the nobles, before whose assaults his father's throne is continually tottering.

With these propensities the prince wastes much time; idle and careless, whenever no positive business binds him, he is away from the court, like a son who is ill at ease in the narrow home circle. To his wild tricks, his madness, and his condescension, is added the idleness of this carousing life, on which account the king is ever holding before him the active life of Harry Percy. To the prince a drinking-bout with drawers is counted as a battle, and he pities Poins that he has lost much honour, because he was not with him in the action. Yet he appears before Vernon with self-accusation, chiding the idleness of youth, which in Percy's eyes too was a blemish in the prince; and even before this, in a casual expression, he appeared to wish to insinuate that Percy's example was not to be lost upon him, when he tells Poins that he is *not yet* of Hotspur's mind, with whom a breakfast of slain Scots proclaims an idle day's work. But that at some future time he might attain to this humour seems to lie in his very nature; for even his father says of him that in early youth he was indeed wanton and effeminate, but desperate also.

The prince at last turns his attention to that which his father and Percy regard as most sacred and most solemn, namely, chivalry and honourable activity in war and state; but he does this with a careless levity, and instead of fame and honour he heaps only ignominy on his head. While the highest justiciary of the kingdom is not considered by him as sacred, and the knightly tournament does not seem to him too serious to allow of his making sport with it; when his father's throne is shaken by the most valiant hero on British soil; he is capable of acting a ludicrous comedy, and he comes playing on his

general's staff to call his merry companions to the field. But if this may be called levity, it may also be indicative of calmness of mind. He trembles not in the least before the frightful alliance of Percy, Douglas, and Glendower. Does there not lie, at the bottom of his composure at this revolt, a firm consciouness and self-reliance? Does not a good conscience appear through all this carelessness, wantonness, and unrestraint; whilst his father, oppressed with suspicion and anguish, is suffering in his prosperity? In the silent manner in which he hears his father's suspicion, what humility and good childlike nature is exhibited! And when it is necessary, when the severe fight at Shrewsbury is threatened, does it not surprise us all, after this unrestrained life and conduct, as it surprises Percy, to read Vernon's splendid picture of the prince and his companions, like that of ostriches and eagles that wing the wind? Does it not appear as if necessity alone could call him to show himself as valiant and eager for war as Percy is always from a strong natural impulse?

The young son of the king stands depreciated among his companions, by his relatives, and by his foes. A notorious offence disgraces him in the eyes of the world, even Poins interprets his character badly, his brothers give him up, his father considers him capable of every misdeed, the honour which Percy heaps upon his own head eclipses him all the more. On which shall we rely in this character—on the evil appearance, which we have exhibited, or on the sparks of honour and of a better nature which throughout we see glancing forth, and which might indicate a kernel of the rarest quality?

The idea which we have seen Shakespeare pursue throughout this whole period of his life, and which we saw at its height in the Merchant of Venice among the series of the non-historical plays of this date before discussed, this idea is exhibited in this character in its most perfect development. Appearance is against this wonderful man. Indifferently, indeed even wilfully, he fosters this show of evil, because in himself he is sure of the perfect essence of a genuine humanity. He sports with public opinion, because any hour he can give it the lie. On the accusation of sins worthy of death, he has in his proud self-reliance no answer but deeds. A many-sided, versatile being, he suffers life to influence him from all sides; he wishes to enjoy it as long as it offers him room for enjoyment, but in this leisure for recreation and jesting, he wishes, like the

Macedonian Philip and like the Egyptian Amasis, only to steel and strengthen himself for the time of action and seriousness. In Poins there is no connection between the exchange of absurd tricks for valiant work and the return from this to frivolous talk, but this two-sidedness of nature appears in the prince in the most wonderfully vivid colours. Buffoon and hero, condescending and proud, a king in transactions with princes, and a beggar with beggars, he knows how to touch by turns every key-note of society and of office, of business and of festivity, of exertion and of relaxation—a master in each. The king is obliged almost against his will to bear witness of him, that although being incensed he's flint, and tho' 'humorous as winter, and as sudden as flaws congealed in the spring of day,' he yet is gracious and has a tear for pity, and a 'hand open as day for melting charity.' The transition from self-forgetfulness in his wild fancies to an act of perfect self-command costs him only a reflection; in his ardour he struck the Lord Chief Justice, and immediately he obeys the arrest; the king himself acknowledges the victory over self in thus yielding to the laws he had just violated. He is of opinion that it is the task of human life to do justice to every circumstance and occasion, to give due time to everything, to assign to each its place and position, to disdain nothing which brings us into contact with the varieties of existence. To conform himself hourly to the monotony of royal dignity was in opposition to his free soul; to pursue glory and honour with intense effort as the compulsory service of a business imposed upon him seemed to him in contradiction to the ordinances of nature, who is moderate in her demands; he had not patience nor strength of habit sufficient for the stoical earnestness of scrupulous conscientiousness; it was not given to him to impose on himself on all occasions the restraint of habit, even though that habit should have been directed to the highest aim. That which with Hamlet is a principle only of words is with him one carried into effect:—

> Rightly to be great,
> Is, not to stir *without great argument:*
> But greatly to find quarrel in a straw,
> *When honour's at the stake.*

And essentially in this principle is he a contrast to the fiery Percy, who in his passion certainly grows angry over 'the ninth part of a hair,' even where no honour is at stake.

Following out this principle, the thin, versatile, frivolous prince makes use of his time for jesting and mirth as long as it is given him. As soon as he has heard from his father that he is thought capable of watching for his father's death, and of treachery against his father's throne, he is struck with dismay, unsuspicious of having stood so low in the opinion of others. Hereafter he determines to be more himself, and he proves in his combat how truly and helpfully he stands by his father's side. When he hears that Percy is so immeasurably preferred before him, his jealousy is awakened against this favourite of fame. For that fire of honour is deeply seated in him also, but it must be struck out of him by the steel of greater demands. He acknowledges of himself that if ambition is a sin he is the most sinful being in the world. He now seeks to meet this envied ideal of all chivalry in single combat and in the battle, and he proclaims to him that he shall not any more *share* the glory with him; that two stars such as they cannot keep 'their motion in one sphere.' He predicted, when he stood blushing with disgrace in the presence of his father, that in the day they met he would 'scour his shame' away with all the honour 'sitting on the helm' of this 'child of renown;' that he would [illegible] ndignities for Percy's glorious deeds, or cancel [illegible] ath. Percy had gathered on his own head the [illegible] e Scottish Douglas, and these heaped-up honours [illegible] will take from him; he shall be but 'the *factor*' [illegible] r. And thus urged by this smouldering fire of [illegible] he encounters Percy's flaming passion for glory; the [illegible] st man meets his despiser, the idler in knightly deeds [illegible] ets the master of chivalry, and he overcomes him, in no [illegible] se because the arbitrary fancy of the poet so willed it, but because the good cause thus required it, and the good powerful nature of the prince thus permitted it—a nature in which qualities were inherent which far outshone even the great gifts of Harry Percy.

For now, when the victory over Percy has given him a higher position, there appear qualities which make him greater than this great one. He stands over the conquered with admiration, with forgiveness, with emotion and pity. It had been his burning ambition to kill Percy; and now it is done the flame is at once extinguished, and gives place to the beautiful human emotions of the heart. And yet more; he gives to the foolish Falstaff the honour of having killed Percy

with the intention of re-establishing his old friend's sullied honour by yielding him this renown; he silently suppresses his self-confidence and renounces a fame only just obtained; with ready modesty he strips the glory from himself, the first time that it falls upon his misjudged life, with a feeling within of that highest honour and dignity, which is content with the self-consciousness and needs not the outward honour. The consideration of human frailty which the fall of the noble Percy forces upon him, and the foreboding words which the dying man addresses to him, have effaced in him all worldly vanity, and in this moment of exaltation the epicurean youth, in whose soul is a full-toned chord in harmony with every occasion, is capable of the most stoical self-denial. In this moment of solemn elevation the supposed death of Falstaff goes not to his heart, and in the following moment he suffers his own merit, without priding himself upon it, to pass silently to the unworthy one. This trait is as little unpremeditated by the poet as that of the prince's valour and military science. For in this character the qualities of self-denial and self-mastery, the disdain of show, the resting upon that inmost hidden worth, the kernel of human existence, [illegible] indeed expressed in his very faults. For he was *unrestr*[illegible] cause he was conscious of having *the reins in hi*[illegible] condescending and generous of his presence onl[illegible] knew himself to be kingly, he was lazy and idle only [illegible] had learned more easily than others, and he gave [illegible] the indulgence of mirth only because he knew what se[illegible] awaited him. And in all his self-indulgence the one prin[illegible] is found predominant—namely, to be true and faithful to natu[illegible] to put no constraint upon her, and not to overstrain her; a[illegible] in this natural condition she preserved for him fresh and healthful powers, which achieved with trifling ease that which others failed to obtain with all their efforts. For contrasting his character, free as it is from show, with that of the glorious Percy, he stands in comparison to the latter as the secure possessor of honour does to the striving competitor for it; of that honour which Bacon calls 'the abode of virtue,' *towards* which the motion of virtue is impetuous, and *within* which it is calm. Hence it is that Henry has nothing of the intensity or exaggeration and of the pathos and vehemence of Percy's nature; and he therefore ridicules the restless straining of the other's powers, when he notwithstanding overtakes him at the goal as

soon as the summons and the demand upon him are evident. When the occasion and the object call forth his powers, he appears famous without effort, valiant without ostentation, transformed to a new life without the necessity of any sacrifice. The most opposite qualities of refinement and amiability, of vigour and energy, form in him a rare combination of which Percy could not be capable. Compared with the latter's passionate temperament, he is quite composed; his proud opinion of himself is self-reliance combined with the calmest modesty. Percy ever bore a jealous ill-will against Henry; but the milder Henry only jests over him, and after his death he weeps for him, which Percy would never have done for Henry. He acknowledges Douglas' merit as well as Percy's, in life and in death, and even when he jests over him, as upon his relation to his wife, he jests not out of a desire for mockery, but out of a love of laughter; for in this very point he would most closely have resembled Percy, and the manner [illegible] he wooes his French Katherine is not very differ[illegible] which Percy might also have wooed his. His [illegible] opposed throughout as a contrast to Percy's ebulli[illegible] his affability and kind amiability are contras[illegible] coarse manners, his moderation and dignity w[illegible] flowing feelings, and his quiet disregard of [illegible] boastful vein; so that in this respect Percy rea[illegible] compared with Henry, as Glendower does com[illegible] But all this appears the more distinctly when [illegible] a just cause demands it, shows himself possess[illegible] splendid qualities, of his bold daring, of his pr[illegible] and of all the indications of a noble pas[illegible] altogether, a striking foil is presented to th[illegible] and qualities of the one by the dark contrast[illegible] youthful life, and he hides the light of his v[illegible] shadows of his faults. And yet more: when[illegible] disclose these his true qualities, he effaces t[illegible] careless indifference as they rise brilliantly[illegible] background; confident as he is of someth[illegible] elevated above all show, in comparison with w[illegible] honour appears as empty vanity—confident of[illegible] humanity, of a power of will, and of prepar[illegible] which like a sun indeed is to break through[illegible] even self-created clouds.

We are struck at once with the relation

the fourth principal figure in the first part of Henry IV., stands to the rest. Henry has it at heart to preserve the royal honour he has acquired to himself and to his house; an ardent love of honour urges him to maintain himself in this position in spotless esteem; it grieves him, therefore, that his son should threaten to forfeit this honour by his unbridled conduct. All that in his own reputation and life might darken its splendour, he seeks with a thousand arts to hide deep within his secret heart. He looks upon honour externally, and refers it only to the rank and the position which he fills; morality has nothing to do with his love of honour; appearance only is to be saved, and his honour is to be maintained in the esteem of the world. With Percy it is otherwise. The honour after which he aspires he wishes to deserve by action and by moral worth; his ambition springs from the honourable feelings of the bravest heart, it is upborne by a noble pride till it swells into a thirst for glory [redacted] danger only provokes the more, and even the injus- [redacted]ns is overlooked in its aim. Different again is [redacted] relation to honour. He is animated by the same [redacted]e same desire for glory as Percy, but it could [redacted]t morbid thirst as in Percy, because it is of a [redacted]ature. It is not pride, but noble self-reliance [redacted] forward; to satisfy himself is of more impor- [redacted]n to stand well in others' esteem; he spiritual- [redacted]he idea of honour into the true dignity of man, [redacted]sness of this possession in himself is his conso- [redacted]gh the appearance of baseness, and through the [redacted] the world. To all these Falstaff stands as a [redacted]he side of these heroes of honour he seems [redacted]f all sense of honour and of shame, and it is not [redacted]o imitate dignity even in play. A respect for [redacted]hers and a need of self-esteem are foreign to [redacted]ess alone which places this machine in motion. especially we will look at this remarkable [redacted]ke a living acquaintance, is on the lips and in [redacted] all. To analyse it in all its fulness would be, [redacted]cult as it would be unacceptable, because the [redacted]f a comic character cannot but destroy it, [redacted]he compensation which in a noble character [redacted]and conception presented more distinctly to [redacted] analysis itself.

[redacted]re said that Shakespeare makes his John

Falstaff a page of the Duke of Norfolk. At this period of his youth we learn that he had intercourse and a quarrel with one Scogan; this name, which is that of a well-known jester under Edward IV., whose frolics were published in 1565, is used by the poet to denote Falstaff's early society and circumstances. Since then he had been thirty-two years with Bardolph and twenty-two years with Poins, in the course of life in which we find him; he has grown old and is the head of the jovial company; he is a born king of drink and a constant frequenter of the houses where eating and drinking are the best. It may be, therefore, that, although he assures the Lord Chief Justice that he was born with his round belly, he rather speaks the truth to the prince, when he says that in his youth he was thin as an eagle's talon, and that drunkenness and idle living had in course of time blown him up like a bladder, so that he could no longer see his own knee. The picture of a mass of indolence and incapability for action, he is the personification of the inferior side of man, of his animal and sensual nature. All the spiritual part of man, honour and morality, refinement and dignity, has been early spoiled and lost in him. The material part has smothered in him every passion, for good or for evil; he was perhaps naturally good-natured, and only from trouble and bad company became ill-natured, but even this ill-nature is as short as his breath, and is never sufficiently lasting to become real malice. His form and his mere bulk condemn him to repose and love of pleasure; laziness, epicurean comfort, cynicism, and idleness, which are only a recreation for his prince, are for him the essence, nature, and business of life itself; and whilst Percy loses appetite and sleep from the excitement of his aspiring spirit, Falstaff, on the contrary is all care about his subsistence. In virtue, therefore, of this animal excess and demand, and the moral stupefaction which is its result, he holds to the natural right of animals: if the young dace be a bait for the old pike, he sees no reason in the law of nature why he may not snap at the simple, the insipid, the dull, and the brisk among mankind. He therefore not only carries on his game for the oppression of all over whom he can secretly gain command, without feeling for the property, welfare, and right of another, but he also employs his more versatile companions for open robbery and stealing; he surrounds himself with the Gadshills, who stand in such bad repute that the carriers on the highway like not to trust them with a lantern, and he even tries to use the prince as a means for robbing the

exchequer; and his fancy mounts so far, that after the prince's accession to the throne he would like to banish law and gallows, and to ennoble the nightly trade of the robber.

Opposed to every political and judicial regulation, and to every moral precept, the preponderance of the material nature has made him obtuse, and thus opposed to all intellectual nourishment. His wit, the only mental gift which he possesses, must itself serve to his subsistence: at any rate, in the Merry Wives of Windsor, he prepares it expressly with this business-like object—to escape want. Want and necessity, it is said in Tarlton's 'Jests,' is the whetstone of wit, and it is even so with Falstaff. This may relate especially to his ingenuity in fraudulent tricks, but the merely intellectual side of his wit may also be referred to his physical heaviness. His mere appearance attracts attention to him, and provokes men to mock him; he affords a picture of the owl bantered by the birds. This position alone calls forth, in self-defence, those powers of wit which for the most part do not spring from direct natural capacity. In all witty and satirical power in men, the innate gift, generally speaking, lies in a negative, realistic nature little adapted for action; the more essential element in this power is its training and cultivation, lying as it does entirely in a keen, well-exercised sense of comparison, and consequently in the most versatile and manifold observation and practice. This habit becomes another nature; it must have been so in Falstaff all the more early and completely, the earlier his mere appearance provoked the attacks of wit. Falstaff says of himself, in a complete characterisation, 'that no man was more able to invent anything that tends to laughter than he invented, or was invented on him; that he was not only witty in himself, but the cause that wit was in other men.' But the passive part of this two-sidedness is necessarily the more original; and however quickly his natural gifts might have led Falstaff from the defensive to the offensive, it yet appears as if his unwieldiness ever drove him back to the former, as if he needed his repose disturbed, and his wit required continual and sharp provocation. For this the persons around him were well calculated. The witty versatility of the prince keeps him for ever out of breath; the red-nosed Bardolph, the butt of his superior quiet humour, is for recreation; but he cannot dispense even with the sharp Poins, who understands teasing and tormenting better than being teased. With such cold people on the other hand as the Lord

Chief Justice and Lancaster his wit is cold, and when his company sinks lower his wit sinks also. Men of a phlegmatic nature are remarkable for gifts of quiet penetration and of keen observation and knowledge of human nature, and the contrast afforded between their mental versatility and their physical awkwardness produces the comic power of their appearance; this, which we have a thousand times observed in phlegmatic men, rises to its height in Falstaff. The comic effect is all the greater the more dry and involuntary is the wit; thus is it with Falstaff; and it is always an utter mistaking of the part when the actors themselves, even older English ones like Quin, display an intention of wit; Hazlitt, however, on the contrary, has utterly distorted this character, by maintaining that Falstaff is a liar, a coward, and a wit, only for the sake of amusing others and to show the humorous side of these qualities; an actor himself just as much as on the stage. Falstaff is indeed so far conscious of his jesting powers that he knows what makes the prince laugh; but in their exercise in every single instance the perfect instinct of habit and nature alone is expressed, and a calculated play of words is never manifested. His whole comic power lies in his unintentional wit and in his dry humour; natural mother-wit ever appears in this way; comic genius, like genius of every kind, moves in the undistinguishable line between consciousness and instinct. It is just this happy medium which Shakespeare assigned to his Falstaff; and *this* medium, and his position as bantering and bantered, as a mark for wit just as much as a dealer in it himself, assigns to him the social place which he always occupied. The life and literature of that period distinguished between the popular and the court fool, between the unschooled mother-wit in the one, and the mask of wisdom in the other, between the clown and the fool, between the man who by nature and exterior provoked the love of laughter and raillery among the people and the man schooled to ridicule honest folly, between the man to whom a well-practised roguery was wit and the man who performed his pranks only with his tongue. Falstaff, not indeed holding any official function, unites both species of jesters in his person, with a natural though not easily distinguishable preponderance of the former, resembling in this the famous Tarlton, about whom contemporaries were continually disputing as to whether his wit was natural or artificial. If we would wish to learn what life and reality afforded the poet for this picture of Falstaff's and his friends'

tricks, for their roving over the country, their raillery of each other, their deceptions towards hosts, maidens, simpletons, &c., we have only to open Tarlton's 'Jests;' we shall then at once perceive how the poet has given an ideal form even to this vulgar realist. But if we would investigate the essence of Falstaff's nature and being, we can only apply to him what Erasmus in his 'Praise of Folly' states as the characteristic of popular and court fools. They take, he says, nature for their guide; they strip off the gloss of refinement and follow animal instinct; they have no conscience, they fear no ghosts, they have no hopes nor cares, they laugh and make others laugh, we forgive all that they say and do, they have no passion, no ambition, no envy and no love, no shyness and no shame.

In truth, if we pass on to Falstaff's moral being, the words *no conscience* and *no shame* express all that we require for acquaintance with him. At times indeed he has attacks of remorse, and these render evident that man's better nature even under such a great material burden is never quite lost. His companions call him Mr. Remorse. When he is in fear, in sickness, or in idleness, he bemoans his vile behaviour with involuntary ejaculations; he is not willingly reminded of his end. But these are only passing paroxysms which do not last. The poet has permitted disgrace, want, and honour, debasement and encouragement, to aim at his moral elevation, but, to use Pistol's words, he remains *semper idem*. Dead to the law of morality, he would fain also remove the law of right. Even that most superficial feeling of honour, the wish to save at least a good appearance—this, the lowest degree of a sense of shame—is wholly extinguished in him. He needs a store of good names, but he has no earnestness in procuring them. Dull and devoid of feeling, he plunders even the poor; he is scornful towards inferiors, cringing towards those whom he fears, and possessing so little sense of gratitude and fellowship that he plays the calumniator behind the back of his friends and benefactors. To what extent all shame is deadened within him is most glaringly depicted when he hacked his sword as an evidence of his heroic deeds, and by this baseness and by his shameless swearing makes even a Bardolph blush. The basis of this character is exhibited in his soliloquy concerning honour, as every reader has felt without any analysis; Falstaff says his catechism there *in thesi*; and the noble Blunt, who has fallen a sacrifice for his king, is his actual proof as to the vanity of this thing which is called

honour. It is this very core or rather nullity of his nature, his lack of honour, which places him as a great and striking contrast to the other principal characters of the play. As in Percy honour and manliness blend into one idea according to the notions of the age, so on the contrary in Falstaff do lack of honour and cowardice. The chivalric age saw the key-note of this character in its thrasonic boasting; and even to us Falstaff appears in all the breadth and height of his nature when he utters his imprecations against a coward, and reveals at the same time his own cowardice and bragging insolence. His gifts are here displayed with the most varied brilliancy; his cowardice exposes him to derision as before his size had done; his lies must extricate him; in this art he is short in memory but long in practice; he is inventive in his bragging, shameless in his inventions, undismayed in his shamelessness, ready for evasion, shuffling, misrepresentation, and tricks. All these qualities intertwine each other in such a manner that it is difficult to say which are the original sources of others, which the derived; at length, when his disgrace has become notorious, and his vexation instantly vanishes in his delight that the booty is safe, we come back again to the superiority of matter, to sensual pleasure, and human brutishness, as to the starting-point and aim of his whole being.

It is not to be denied that the poet has bestowed all these traits upon Falstaff (astonished as we may be in thus gathering them together), which certainly make a compound of baseness. How comes it, nevertheless, that we do not abhor the cowardly Jack as such; that, on the contrary, we find ourselves even feeling undisturbed delight in him? There are many complex causes which tend to moderate and even entirely to bribe over our moral judgment upon this character. Readily and involuntarily we mingle pleasure in the delineation of the poet with pleasure in the subject delineated. The liveliness of the picture; the abundance of the choicest wit; the unusually skilful touch in the choice of the ridiculous and the comic in the mere exterior of this phenomenon; and finally the blending of the ideal with the individual, which allows us to recognise in Falstaff now a typical character, and now an actual well-known personage; all this is done with such masterly power, that it is excusable if any transfer their admiration from the work of art to the subject of it. But even the subject itself has that within it which exercises a corrupting influence upon the estimate of its moral value. Shake-

speare says of Parolles, in All's Well that Ends Well, that he is so consummate in baseness that we take pleasure in it; that 'he hath outvillained villainy so far that the rarity redeems him.' In this delight in anything complete of its kind we look upon Falstaff; if we seriously reflect on the matter, the pleasure which we take in him is indeed scarcely other than that which we take in Reineke Fuchs; the contrast of bare naturalness which in both cases the heroes of such different poems present, compared to all that order, custom, habit, and higher principles have sanctioned, is so complete, that the comic impression made by every striking contrast allows no moral consideration to assert itself. To this one contrast which influences our judgment is added yet another. This is the contrast between the great sensual inclinations and desires of this cynical epicurean and his small capability for enjoyment, between his paralytic old age and his affectation of youth, between the easy existence after which his ponderous body longs and to which this burden in itself never suffers him to attain. The preponderance of this material burden over the intellectual powers might have been brought upon Falstaff by his own fault; but we regard it as a burden which, once bestowed, renders him, like the first error of the drunkard, almost unaccountable for succeeding sins. The picture of human frailty, weakness, and dependence upon outward things which Falstaff presents, softens our moral vigour.

But this must not indeed be to such a degree as to make us prove the bluntness of Falstaff's own feelings in our estimate of his worth. Hazlitt went so far as to say we could as little blame Falstaff's character as that of the actor who plays him; we should only consider the agreeable light in which he placed certain weaknesses, careless of the consequences, and from which, moreover, no pernicious consequences arose! He will not forgive the prince his treatment of Falstaff, for to the readers of poetry in the present day, he says that Falstaff appears as *the better man of the two!* This is indeed the acme of moral bluntness into which the æsthetic criticism of a man who has, however, made many striking remarks upon Shakespeare, has unwarily erred. But the contrary view—the judgment for instance which Nathan Drake pronounced, who drew from this character an awful and impressive lesson of morality, as great as human weakness can ever present—has been very rarely followed by other expositors and readers. Still fewer are the actors comprehending this character like Hackett, who, from the report of

those who saw him, and according to a record from his own pen, did not recognise in this detestable compound of vice and sensuality any amiable or tolerable quality given him by the poet to cover his moral deformity, except a surpassingly brilliant wit and irresistible humour. And yet it is necessary to save the poet—on whose infallibility in moral things we may rely more than on his æsthetic faultlessness—from the reproach of having been guilty of the strange contradiction of letting his fat Jack become endeared to us, only to tear him mercilessly from us without reason and right. Our romanticists have pitied Falstaff's end, and have condemned the judgment which proffers the choice of a competence in life to the reformed, and disgrace to the incorrigible; they have indeed even supposed that Shakespeare might have written another conclusion. Even so severe a moralist as Johnson has considered Falstaff's vices contemptible rather than detestable; it seemed as if cowardice, lying, sensual gratification, baseness, robbery, ingratitude, and all the crimes in the world were to be made absolvable just because they are thus accumulated in Falstaff. The pernicious consequences which just before the act of disgrace led to murder in Hostess Quickly's house were wholly disregarded by the jealous interpreters. Falstaff's intercourse (and this was indeed a masterpiece of effect) appeared not only ensnaring and alluring to the prince, but also to the reader; the delight of seeing us well entertained prevented the blame of immorality from gaining ground. Thus far had the poet reached his object with ourselves, thus far did we all feel with the prince. But on his sentence of judgment we would no longer comprehend him. In this we fell far short of the prince in moral severity and nobility, and in the true dignity of man; far short of the prince and of the poet, who knew very well what he was doing, and what he made his Henry do. This lies plainly expressed to every attentive reader in the whole course of the second part of Henry IV., only that this play in its representation is usually blended with the first part, and much of it is omitted, as was the case even in King James' time, according to a manuscript discovered in 1844; it is moreover rarely read with the same attention as the first part; perhaps for the very reason that Falstaff here plays no longer the brilliant rôle which he does in the first part. But it almost appears as if the age had not at once found the true solution of the characters of the prince and Falstaff, and their relation to each other; and as if the poet,

therefore, in Henry V. and in the Merry Wives of Windsor, had intentionally sought opportunity to make himself thoroughly intelligible. These two plays, as well as the second part of Henry IV., possess perhaps the smallest æsthetic value among all the later works of our poet, but they possess an ethical value all the greater. They continue the history of the first part of Henry IV. almost entirely with a moral aim, and they alone are sufficient to show us that in Shakespeare's time the law arising from the impure æstheticism of the romanticists and their followers did not exist, the law namely which emancipates poetry from morality.

HENRY IV.

PART II.

Upon the second part of Henry IV. we have but few words to say, since the political and ethical idea of the first part is here only continued, and is not replaced by a new one in a new group of characters and actions. The great characters in the first part—Glendower, Douglas, Percy—have disappeared, the king's physical constitution is broken, and a mental change appears to have begun in the prince; the space which Falstaff and his companions occupy is wider than formerly, but it loses in attraction. The threatening of the state in the little war of these freebooters stands out all the more glaringly as the great revolt of the Percys recedes. The exertion of the great powers in the first part is followed by a universal exhaustion in the second; and only secretly is a new energy preparing itself in Prince Henry, which is subsequently developed in the following play of Henry V. As soon as we consider the tetralogy in connection, the lower range of this third piece appears as necessary in an æsthetic as in an ethical sense.

The flagging appears first in political life—in the weak continuation and in the dishonourable end of the revolt. Its soul had fled with Percy, whose courage had animated every peasant and whose death had now dispirited all. His father Northumberland, a cipher when left to himself, feels a paroxysm of courage at the moment of rage and sorrow, but soon allows himself to be brought back by a woman's arguments to his usual nature; instead of marching his troops he sends a letter to the Archbishop of York, as he had before done to his son; and as he had left the one so he leaves the other to destruction, and flees to Scotland. The revolt is now placed in the hands of York. It is now to be sanctioned by the varnish of religion instead of being fought out with valour. Such a great undertaking as the subversion of a kingdom is to be accomplished with caution,

and no longer with the wild fancies with which Percy attempted it. The insurgent nobles build upon the French assistance which Mortimer is to bring; they hope not so much from their own courage as from the king's empty coffers, and from the people's weariness of his rule. Already under Percy the hearts of the people were wanting to the cause of the revolt, but here even the hearts of the conspirators themselves are deficient. The valour of Mowbray, the son of Norfolk, in whom the old enmity of his house against Bolingbroke yet works, is here as little followed as was Vernon's caution in Percy's councils. And among the over-wise who had examined everything and had considered everything, not even is the caution to be found, at the mutual treaty for the discharge of the troops, of delaying the measure until the enemy should have accomplished it also. The shallow beginning ends foolishly with an awkward and disgraceful act of deception on the side of the Prince of Lancaster, who is led by the crafty Westmoreland. Among the honourable adversaries at Shrewsbury, the presence of the king and of Prince Henry on the one side, and of Percy on the other, would have made such perfidy impossible. Lancaster has inherited all the qualities of Henry IV. which the Prince of Wales has discarded, who indeed has little love for this brother, though he acknowledges his valour at Shrewsbury. Lancaster is brave and honourable from a sense of duty, grave from propriety, prudent from precocity; the place which his brother lost in the council, he, in his extreme youth, has obtained. If we credit Falstaff, his wit, however, does not reach far; he drinks no wine, eats only fish, and can scarcely be made to laugh. The trick which he plays the rebels savours of his father's school; in honour, indeed, this son, with all his docility, falls short of his father's policy, in the same degree as Prince Henry with his indocility exceeds it.

As thus compared with the first part of Henry IV. the actions and characters here take a lower position, so is it also if we turn to Falstaff and his company. The contrast of his inner development compared with that of the prince is the thread carried through the whole piece, the catastrophe of which is the catastrophe of their mutual relation; this lies at the close of the play, and necessitates a continuation, which is immediately announced in the epilogue. We have thus to trace the growth of this catastrophe, a task after the termination of which we shall require not a word further in vindication of the much

attacked conclusion or of the poet himself. From an ethical point of view this business is like the washing of gold-sand when once the muddy surface has been penetrated.

We have seen that Falstaff, at the close of the first part, in the battle of Shrewsbury, obtained the honour of the victory over Percy transferred to him by prince Henry. From this renunciation of the prince a great rumour of Falstaff's valour spreads among all people, and he becomes a kind of mythical character; the Chief Justice, the sheriff's officers, and the women; friends, and enemies are filled with his heroic courage. The prince has effaced his old sins, the day of the battle has annulled the accusation of his robberies; a store of good names, of which he stood in need, has been accumulated upon him without merit, the seriousness of the time summons of itself to serious concentration, and the prince is touched to the heart by this admonition. The worthy Chief Justice encourages Falstaff expressly to make use of the good state of his reputation that it may be lasting. The poet and the truly careful friends of Falstaff have omitted nothing to keep him on the road to honour, upon which, undeservedly, chance and the sacrifice of the prince have placed him. The king has intentionally separated him and the prince, in order to guard against mutual misleading. They have withdrawn from him the coarse Bardolph, and have associated with him an innocent page of a nature yet sound, and not merely as *he* supposes to set him off by his diminutive stature, but to accustom him to more refined society. And this choice has been made with true wisdom and discretion; for the little man is in no wise of Lancaster's feminine turn of mind he soon learns to empty his pint; he understands wit and jests and similes like one practised in them; but they are of a more refined kind than Bardolph or Peto would understand; they are even occasionally so deeply learned that, although they do not stand the philological examination of the commentators, they imposed upon the prince himself. To all this is added that Falstaff was associated with the severe and serious Prince of Lancaster; he is to accompany him to the north, while the king goes with Prince Henry to Wales.

But all this makes no impression upon Falstaff's insensible nature; all that the prince contrives for him dissatisfies him. He has already half dismissed him from his favour. He is furious at the service he is to discharge; he is still tarrying in London when the prince has already finished his expedition to

Wales. Instead of being raised by the fame of Shrewsbury, he is only more shameless and vulgar. We find him again, the vanquisher of Percy, with his credit fallen so low that he uses Bardolph as his bail; we see him fighting and quarrelling in the streets with a low woman whom he means to cheat and to dupe; we find him, in spite of his constant inclination to boast of his chivalry, for a second time promising to wed this woman, only that he may again rob the simple credulous creature of her poor property; we hear him with secret backbiting slandering his lord; and when for all this he is rebuked with a thrice repeated 'fie' by the dignified Chief Justice, to whom the prince had once respectfully yielded, he perseveres in his shamelessness, bursts forth in derision, and in secret swears destruction to the Chief Justice, which he purposes to effect on the day of Henry IV.'s death. Thus, instead of restoring his honour, he damages it yet further. The little page, instead of being able to work upon him, is soon so far influenced, that although 'there is a good angel about him the devil outbids him too.' The prince himself looks after Falstaff in disguise; he sees him ever degraded to still lower company; in the presence of the outcasts of the people he hears how he speaks evil of him, his benefactor, so much so that even Poins demands speedy vengeance from the prince. In his office he plays the old swindler; with cold derision he has seen his former recruits, a hundred and fifty in number, 'pickled' at the battle of Shrewsbury, and three only left alive; he now again selects all the good-for-nothing rabble, the able he discharges for payment; defrauded in this business by Bardolph, he again defrauds the state! Once again, on the apprehension of Coleville, an undeserved honour forces itself upon him. Lancaster wishes to extol this deed, as his brother had the deeds of Shrewsbury. All in vain. He now goes to Gloucestershire and plunders the Shallows, who think to use him and his influence at court. When the intelligence of the king's death comes, he expects the old dream of the authority of rogues to be realised. The laws of England, he boasts, are now at his commandment; every post of honour he may now dispose of at will to every simpleton and robber. In the hostess' house the new aspect of the period leads directly to a murder; and when the officers of justice speedily interfere, hostess Quickly raises a lamentation that 'right should thus overcome might,' and wishes Falstaff back to help her with his power; and engages also to deliver the

arrested Doll. Then he meets with his glaring and well-deserved fall; justice and order regain their rights.

The scenes in which Falstaff appears in this piece are of so low a character that the æsthetic and ethical deformity can only be justified by this serious conclusion. Every reader will feel that in this part he loses much of his pleasure and interest in Falstaff, whose picture is generally drawn only from the first part. Indeed, it is doubtful whether sympathy with him would not sink too low, if Shakespeare had not used an artifice for raising him in the same degree in which he had fallen on the one side, by presenting fresh contrasts on the other. The poet has placed by his side new characters, whom in general value we yet find far below him, and who cast upon him a more favourable light, just when this in our estimation becomes most necessary. There is the swaggerer Pistol, whose picture we need only see (Hogarth has drawn the actor Cibber, to whom the nickname Pistol was given, in this part) in order at once to perceive how human Falstaff appears by the side of this caricature. He is a bully and swaggerer by profession, while Falstaff is so only when misled by circumstance; he is a man as from another world, while Falstaff in all his weaknesses is of our own flesh and blood; he is of a false spirit and a distorted nature, while Falstaff appears sound in sense; he is a hero compared to Nym, but Falstaff is a hero compared to him; he is is too shabby and abject even for a Doll, whilst Falstaff is esteemed by hostess Quickly as an honest true-hearted man. And while the one is a mine of the most genuine wit, Pistol speaks with bombast and affectation in pompous phrases gathered from miserable tragedies, or as Nym will have it in the unintelligible style of a conjuror. In contrast to this over-fantastic fellow stands the insipid Shallow, a braggart, a liar, and a rogue, again of another kind. How brilliant Falstaff's ever out-gushing wit appears by the side of this blockhead, who has not crammed himself like Pistol with fragments of plays learned by heart, but who rather betrays his poverty of thought in the chattering repetition of indifferent words! How on the stage must Falstaff's calm yet quick eye, observing much in a short flash, have contrasted with the unmeaning empty glance of Shallow, the cynical security of the one with the half-witted manner of the other; how prominent must have been that physical power which drew spirit and wit from the sack, and which on the other hand silenced the weak squire! Does not

the false bragging of Falstaff over his latest deeds of valour, and his dangerous allusion to present circumstances, inspire a kind of esteem compared to that stereotyped justice of the peace, who boasts of past sins which he has never committed? Is not this the case with Falstaff's rodomontades, which are ever young and fresh, whilst the other tells certain uniform lies from habit? Is not the tattered spendthrift dearer to us than the pedant and niggard? And is not even the official fraud of the fat knight more pardonable than the venality of the judge? And who can grieve at last that the loquacious, vain, blockhead should fall as a sure prey into the jaws of the quick-witted Falstaff, when he had intended to abuse the knight at court for his own advantage? Thus placed in this low society, Falstaff again approaches somewhat closer to our sympathy. In this society the good Shallow is not even the lowest on the scale. In his cousin Silence, the man of untameable mirth when he is tipsy, and of asinine dulness when he is abstinent, this great fool yet possesses an admirer.

In exact contrast to Falstaff's ruin the poet at the same time leads Prince Henry back from the path of error. We meet him on his return from Wales in company with Poins, whom he likes the best of his Ephesian friends, and who has most regard for himself. In his general humour little appears changed; he is familiar as before with his dissolute companions, and interchanges with them his coarse and indelicate witticisms; he has still longings for small beer, such as he was accustomed to drink in this company. But here for the first time he is ashamed of this low taste, and reproaches himself for associating with Poins and his friends, and for becoming initiated into all their meanest secrets. The thought of his father's sickness and possible death has softened him; he is sad even to weeping. His heart bleeds inwardly, but intercourse with his frivolous companions has unaccustomed him to the demeanour of sorrow and sadness. Poins construes this change into hypocrisy, and looks upon his former hilarity at the prospect of the crown as his natural mood. The princely blood in Henry is roused. 'Thou think'st me,' he says to Poins, 'as far in the devil's book as thou and Falstaff for obduracy and persistency; let the end try the man.' He receives letters from Falstaff in the old familiar tone, but in the manner in which he receives them, and in the manner in which he converses with Poins, a separation of feeling is perceptible. The

seriousness of circumstances, the illness of his father, the approach of the period of his high vocation, have roused him, and the resolutions of that first soliloquy which we heard from him begin to ripen into action. He can no longer with his irresistible humour resign himself as before to the frivolities of his old friends; he remembers his dignity at every moment between the promptings of the old vein. 'We play the fools with the time,' he says, 'and the spirits of the wise sit in the clouds and mock us.' He inquires after Falstaff, he wishes to go in disguise to spy after him, that he may see him in his true colours; but he goes not in his former unsuspiciousness to find pleasure in him; there is an object in his errand; 'the purpose must weigh with the folly!' He finds Falstaff, as we have before intimated, entirely lost. We cannot say of the prince that he formerly authorised Falstaff in everything, or that he licensed him in everything. When he once compared his father to a singing man of Windsor, the prince broke his head; even in the midst of the most jovial condescension he had never renounced his princely position. He now finds him heartlessly mocking at him in the hearing of an utterly reprobate being, and how shall he longer waste his heart on him? This barefaced backbiting had before appeared to the prince to go beyond the jest which can be permitted face to face. The inner estrangement is felt throughout; there is now no comedy played, when the tidings come from the court, the freely indulged mirth of the former connection is gone. The prince comes to the court at his father's end. The last suspicion rouses fully his veiled nature. This one scene, which needs no explanation, is worth all the rest of the play. The king's apparent death cuts him to the heart, Warwick finds him sitting over the crown like a picture of mourning sorrow. The hearts even of the most unconcerned tremble with doubt as to what the kingdom may expect from him. The far-seeing Warwick had flattered the sick king that the prince had but studied his wild companions like a strange tongue, the most immodest word of which is learned; that in the perfectness of time he would cast off his followers. But when the perfectness of time came, he seemed to be of another opinion, and he wishes the heir to the throne had the temper of the worst of his brothers. His brothers see with astonishment Henry's deep emotion, when he appears as king; the worthy Lord Chief Justice he keeps in suspense to the very last; at length with

calm majesty he draws back the clouds from his bright and pure nature, and with one word sets all at rest, by promising that this very man shall be a father to him, that *his* voice shall sound before all others in his ear, and that he will follow his wise directions. Wildness and passion have died and been buried with his father; the tide of blood, hitherto flowing in vanity, turns and ebbs back to the sea, where it shall mingle 'with the state of floods, and flow henceforth in formal majesty.' The change of feeling which had commenced with his call against the rebels is completed at his higher vocation to occupy the English throne, and it is soon confirmed by his kingly life and his heroic deeds. Here also on the largest scale does the poet sketch the amendment of the noblest of his humourists. Upon each, upon Biron, and upon Benedick, he imposes the task of showing in their domestic relations their ability for meeting the seriousness of life as well as its jests. This demand the royal Henry has to satisfy in the highest business of political and military life. And here in a splendid manner he mocks the expectation of the world, frustrates prophecies, and 'razes out rotten opinion, who had writ him down *after his seeming*.' The character and the plays which turn upon the development of this character are on this point magnificent counterparts to the Merchant of Venice, and make us perceive in an extraordinary manner how deep was the impulse with which Shakespeare at this time reflected upon the value of human existence, and upon its true and its apparent worth. In the one was represented the apparent worth of man endowed with outward possession, in the other the apparent worth of outward authority and esteem; gold and outward honour, the vehicles of all *seeming*, the gods of those who cling to appearance, are the poles round which these plays revolve. As Bassanio deals lightly with money, so does Henry deal carelessly with this outward honour; to show the different relation of different beings to possession and to honour has been the task in each. From the unusual emphasis, extent, and depth with which this is done, it has often been concluded that Shakespeare may have been connected with these plays in a personal manner. But to this point we will return later.

HENRY V.

THE history of Henry V., as we read it in the text of the folio edition of 1623, existed previously in a defective sketch, which has been preserved in three older quarto editions (1600, 1602, 1608), but unfortunately in such a disfigured form that it seems hardly possible to conceive a correct idea of the poet's first design; it is, therefore, venturesome and inadmissible to draw any conclusion whatever from their comparison, respecting their accurate relation to the improved play which will alone occupy our attention. In this last form the play appears to be written in immediate connection with the preceding histories. The epilogue to Henry IV. already announces the play; the chorus at the close of Henry V. looks back, at the conclusion of the great work of this tetralogy, to the earlier histories of Henry VI., 'which oft our stage hath shown.' The date of this piece is certified by the allusion of the chorus in the fifth act to the Earl of Essex's military expedition to Ireland. This passage must have been written between the April and October of 1599. In outward bearing, the piece resembles the second part of Henry IV. The choruses seem to announce that here the 'brighest heaven of invention' is to be ascended; yet this is reached rather in a patriotic and ethical sense than in an æsthetic one. The lack of all plot and the prose of the low scenes check the poetic flight; some of these scenes, such as that between Katharine and Alice, and that between Pistol and Le Fer, might even be well omitted. Here and there the poetry in this piece rises, it must be admitted, to the most lofty expression, and this especially in the choruses. This unequal form seems to reflect the deep nature of the subject displayed. Interpreters regarded these choruses as a means for investing the piece with an epic character, for which the simple battle material seemed to them more adapted. But these choruses are maintained in a bold, ardent, figurative diction, utterly opposed to the epic; Shakespeare rather employs this more elevated poetry to place

the hero of his poem in the splendid heroic light in which from his unassuming nature he cannot place himself, and in which, when arrived at the height of his fame, he expressly wishes not to be seen by those around him. Garrick felt very justly that in representation these choruses ought not only not to be omitted, but that they ought to be placed most prominently forward: he spoke them himself.

The whole interest of our play lies in the development of the ethical character of the hero. After the poet has delineated his careless youthful life in the first part of Henry IV., and in the second part has shown the sting of reflection and consideration piercing his soul as the period of self-dependence approaches, he now displays Henry as arrived at the post of his vocation, and exhibits the king acting up to his resolutions for the future. At the very beginning of the play we are at once informed of the utter change which has passed over him. The sinful nature is driven out of him by reflection, the current of reformation has suddenly scoured away the old faults; as the wholesome strawberry ripens best 'neighboured by fruit of baser quality,' so his active practice, his intercourse with lower life and simple nature, has matured in him all those gifts which etiquette and court ceremony would never have produced in him, and which those now around him perceive in him with admiration. The poet expressly tells us, through the prelates who discuss the king in the first scene, that there are no miracles, either in his poetry or the world, and that the natural grounds for this wonderful change are to be sought for really in the unpromising school of this apparently untutored man. There this many-sidedness was developed, which now astonishes them in him, and on account of which he now appears equally acquainted with all things, ecclesiastical and secular, in the cabinet as in the field. He no longer squanders his now valuable time, but weighs it to the last grain; the curb of mildness and mercy is now placed on his passions, and even foreign lands conjecture that

> his vanities fore-spent
> Were but the outside of the Roman Brutus,
> Covering discretion with a coat of folly.

And *how* justly his systematic wickedness was calculated, how entirely according to his design the unexpected sunshine broke through the veil of clouds, is excellently expressed in the

scene in which the king first meets us again, discussing with his counsellors the important business of the wars with France. The force and courage of men, the success and the favour of Providence, is manifest in every word of this discussion. 'When once the mind,' says Bacon, 'has placed before it noble aims, it is immediately surrounded not only by the virtues, but by the gods!' Every one, in the suddenness of his gladly disappointed expectation, appears as if electrified. The thought of honour prevails in every breast. All classes are equally devoted to him in heroic unity; his family, his uncle and brothers, no less than the nobles, urge him to the war; the clergy give him the mightiest sum that they had ever granted to an English king; they depict to him the heroic age of the Edwards, and call him to renew their feats; everything breathes courage and good will. As if seized with a better spirit, even Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol seem to settle their quarrels among themselves, that as sworn brothers they may march against France. The Eumenides of the insurrection, who had disturbed and crossed the rule of Henry IV., are heard retreating in the distance. The Irish, who had rebelled against Richard II., and the Welsh and Scotch, with whom Henry IV. had to fight, appear together as countrymen in the king's army. The treachery of a few bribed nobles is easily frustrated. The words of the dying Henry IV. are fulfilled, that the crown seemed in him merely as 'an honour snatched with boisterous hand,' and the quarrel which arose in consequence was the argument of which his reign had been the scene. His death 'changed the mode.' The young king follows the home policy which his father had in dying commended to him; he leads those 'overproud with sap and blood' into foreign war, and turns their thoughts to new and greater things.

This policy urges Henry to the French war; he is urged to it by right and the well-grounded claim of which with religious conscientiousness he is convinced; he is urged to it by his ambition, which bids him compensate for his youth and its idleness by great deeds. His history, he desires, shall speak with full mouth freely of his acts, or else his grave 'shall have a tongueless mouth, not worship'd with a waxen epitaph.' The scorn of the enemy and the mocking taunt at his madly-spent youth excite his passion for the righteous war, which he has undertaken with steadfast resolve, and to this passion he gives vent in an ambition equally scornful:—he never valued 'this

poor seat of England,' but when he rouses himself in his throne of France, for which he has laid by his majesty, he will 'rise there with so full a glory, that he will dazzle all the eyes of France.' It is in this war that he acknowledges himself the most offending soul alive if it be a sin to covet honour; for now he has the great object before him, as we have said before, in behalf of which it must seem to him noble to be roused. In his fight at Agincourt he has before him even to surpass the warlike Edwards, when, with a little, weak, famished band, he has to withstand the brillant force of the French, at least five-fold more in number. And in this position he aspires truly after the wholly undiminished glory of a position so desperate; he prefers not to lose so much 'honour as one man more would share from him,' who should come to his assistance from England.

In these expressions somewhat of that strained nature may seem to lie, which we pointed out in Percy as opposed to Henry; and truly we see the king in this over-strained condition throughout the whole war. This would be a contradiction in his character, if anything were a contradiction in it; but we showed throughout that it belongs to his nature and essence to be everything when occasion calls him and necessity claims him. We found him indolent and idle amid the degeneracy of a corrupt period of peace; now that he is in the war he is a soldier, showing himself collected and eager, mighty and violent in word and deed, acquainted with the terrible ravages of war, and with unrestrained passions ready even at the right moment to unbridle them himself. In peace, he says himself, nothing so becomes a man as modest stillness and humility; but in war he must 'imitate the action of the tiger, stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood, and disguise fair nature with hard-favoured rage.' Just so, influenced less by principle than after his fashion by time and place, the king's behaviour at first towards the French ambassador is marked by resolute decision; he sends back defiance and contempt to the scornful Dauphin; he is announced by the French embassy as coming 'in thunder, and in earthquake, like a Jove;' and thus we see him before Harfleur, threatening the citizens with all the terrors of a besieged town. Once had *Prince* Henry said that he was 'not yet of Percy's mind,' but the *King* is so now. Just in the same way would Percy's impatient spirit have chafed before a besieged city; just in the same way as Henry does

would Percy have broken out with boasting before the scornful French ambassadors, infected by the soil of the boastful nation; just in the same way did Vernon's words provoke Percy at Shrewsbury as the Dauphin's message now does the prince; and yet, at his subsequent wooing of Katherine, he is as entirely the soldier, as far from quibbling rhetoric and as free from all arts of verse and mincing as Percy ever could have appeared. The world now compares him, as the poet once had done Percy, to Cæsar and to Alexander. He appears now wrathful and terrible as the war-god, when, in the battle of Agincourt, furious at the plunder and slaughter committed by the flying French, he commands the death of the prisoners. His ambition now also, like Percy's, imperceptibly passes into a thirst for honour, which, when in hasty impatience it desires to obtain an object, weighs not means and ways.

But that which at once obliterates all these similarities to Percy is the contrast of circumstances, which at once draw out in him those opposite qualities which Percy could not have possessed. Left to himself, and unprovoked, the braggart is all humility; in the pauses of rest the warlike tiger is peaceful and tame. He calls himself a man like every other, whose affections are indeed higher mounted, yet when they stoop they stoop with the like wing. Percy's affections did not do this. Never would he have been seen, least of all as king, in that condescension which marks Henry in his present position; never, in the moment of serious preparation for hot strife, would he have exhibited the tranquil repose which Henry manifested. In his courtship and on the day of battle Henry is just as plain a king as if he had 'sold his farm to buy his crown.' He has shaken off his old dissolute companions, but the remembrances of that simple intercourse are recalled to our mind at every moment. The same inclination to rove about with the common man in his army, the old mildness and familiarity, and the same love for an innocent jest, exist in him now as then, without derogating in the least from his kingly dignity. He leaves his nobles waiting in his tent, while he visits the posts of his soldiers; the old habit of night-watching is of use to him now; he sounds the disposition of individuals; he encourages them without high-sounding words; he fortifies them without ostentation; he can preach to them and solve moral scruples, and can make himself intelligible to them; he contrives a trick quite of the old kind in the moment of most gloomy suspense; like a

brother, he borrows the cloak of the old Erpingham; he familiarly allows his countryman Fluellen to join freely in his conversation with the herald, and in his short appeal before the battle he declares all to be his brothers who on this Crispin's day shed their blood with him.

This contrast between his repose and calmness and his martial excitement, between his plain homely nature and the kingly heroic spirit which in the moment of action exercises dominion over him, is, however, not the only one in which the poet has exhibited him. The night before and the day during the battle, which form the centre of our play, is a period so prominent, and one in which such manifold moods, emotions, and passions are roused and crossed, that the best opportunity was here afforded to the poet for exhibiting to our view this many-sided man in all the richness and the diversity of his nature. When the mind is quickened, he himself says, 'the organs break up their drowsy grave, and newly move with casted slough and fresh legerity;' and thus is it with him in this great and decisive moment. We see him in a short time alternate between the most different emotions and positions, ever the same master over himself, or we may rather say, over the opportunity and the matter which lie for the moment before him. The French herald comes and challenges him to ransom himself from his unavoidable detention; he returns a proud bragging declaration; he repents it while he is speaking. He is seized with a moment of passion, as in that collision with the Chief Justice, but at once he is again master of himself; nor was he so forgetful, even in the moment of excitement, as in any way to neglect the truthfulness of his nature; imprudently he conceals not from the enemy the critical condition of his little army. At night, well knowing the danger of his position, we find him in the most serious mood: he desires no other company, he and his bosom will debate awhile. This debating is disturbed by contact with all sorts of people belonging to his camp. He hears the scorn of the boaster, he listens to the voice of the pedantic lover of discipline, and he talks with the apprehensive who are better and braver than their words. That truth so incapable of dissimulation speaks in him even here. What would it have cost him to boast of the king in the name of a third person, and to declare that he was cheerful and full of trust? But he does it not; he desires as little in the soldiers as in

himself to extinguish the consciousness of danger, in order that he may spur them by the necessity to their utmost exertion. When he remarks this anxious expectation, he assures them truly that the king himself would not wish to be anywhere but where he is. The serious natures are occupied with the question as to whether they must answer with their souls for the possible injustice of the royal cause they fight for, or whether the king, if they die for him unprepared, will have to answer for their sins? He turns field preacher and explains to them; he falls into a quarrel on the matter with the coarse Williams; he takes up the jest as well as the edifying conversation, though the acting out of the matter is to be disturbed by the bloody seriousness of the battle. After the unexpected interruption and its half-constrained humorous turn the king sinks all the more completely into solemn deliberation with himself; meditation and seriousness overtake and overburden his soul. After the soldiers had just been laying their cares and burdens to the king's charge, how natural is the sequence of this same king's train of thought, that having known the happiness of private life he should recall it to his mind at this hour, when ceremony, the prerogative of kings, from which he was ever escaping, must appear so empty to him. He, he says in the deepest self-consciousness of his real sterling value, he is a king who has found out this ceremony and its importance! How enviously (standing before the last pinnacle of his fame, as his father had done before in the moment of sickness and distress), how enviously he looks upon the healthful occupation of the peasant, who rises with the sun, 'sweats in the eye of Phœbus, and all night sleeps in Elysium'—and how affecting and striking is it, and how completely in the spirit of this king by merit, that in sight of this happy toil of the poor, returning to his former idea, he sees the vocation of the king in this, that he, conscious and vigilant, with *his own* labour and exertions, establishes that security of the state and that peace which the poor man enjoys in unconscious happiness. His meditation upon the ideas thus aroused is followed by the perfect collectedness of mind exhibited in that fervent prayer, in which he prays God 'not to-day' to think upon his father's fault. Then he rides forth to see the order of the battle. And as he meets his nobles, and hears Westmoreland's wish to have here 'one ten thousand of those men in England that do no work,' he shows how seriously he means to gain for himself, out

of this very necessity, the highest prize of honour without further help. How popular after his old fashion, and at the same time how sublime, is his encouragement to the battle! How calm his last words to the French herald! How far is he from being over-hasty in giving credit to the victory! When he hears of the touching death of the noble York, how near is he to tears! and at the same moment, alarmed by a new tumult, how steeled to a bloody command! how impatiently furious at the last resistance! and at the moment when victory decides for him, how pious and how humble! And again, a short time after this solemn elevation of mind, he concludes his joke with Williams, careful even then that no harm should result from it. The poet has continued in the fifth act to show us to the very last the many-sided nature of the king. The terrible warrior is transformed into the merry bridegroom, the humorous vein again rises within him; yet he is not so much in love with his happiness, or so happy in his love, that in the midst of his wooing, and with all his jest and repartee, he would relax the smallest article of the peace which his policy had designed.

But how is it? Has not the poet forgotten that grand feature in Henry's character, that profound modesty, which formerly, as if wilfully, veiled all his brilliant qualities? Is it only expressed in the serious mood before the battle, which is however natural, even in the coarse, quarrelsome Williams, when in a similar position? Or was there no occasion to display this former characteristic of the prince, which appeared to us the very marrow of his virtue? Or did he cast it off for this once at this noble provocation for the exertion of all his powers. We saw him at the battle of Shrewsbury voluntarily yield one glorious deed to his inglorious friend; but here he has fought a battle, the whole glory of which falls on him alone, and which the poet with evident design has cast upon him alone, since he keeps the heroic forms of Bedford, Salisbury, and York so completely in the back-ground. What turn does his modesty take, if it retains its old character of avoiding after its fashion this glaring light of fame? The answer is this: it deepens in the same degree as his fame becomes more exalted; it becomes humility, and gives the honour to God. This sentence will shock many of Shakespeare's worshippers, who discover in him nothing but æsthetic and moral free-thinking, and who regard him as a man of disorderly and wild

genius. But to our mind the truth of the sentence and the truth of the delineation of the character can be little disputed. Throughout the whole play, throughout the whole bearing of the king, sounds the key-note of a religious composure, of a severe conscientiousness, and of an humble modesty. The Chronicle itself, which extols Henry so highly that it placed him before the poet as an historical favourite, praises the king's piety at home and at every page in his campaign; Shakespeare accepted this historical hint in no mechanical manner, but wrought it appropriately into the characteristics of his hero. The clergy, at the very beginning of the play, call him a true friend of the Church, and have reason to rejoice over his respect for it, as well as over his knowledge of sacred things. When he is occupied with the plan of war, he charges the Archbishop of Canterbury with a solemn oath to take heed in his counsel; he 'will believe in heart,' that what he speaks as to his right to this war is in his 'conscience washed as pure as sin with baptism.' When he has no thought but France, those to God alone 'run before' his business. He receives it as a promising ordinance from God that the treason lurking in his way is 'brought to light.' He delivers his 'puissance into the hand of God, putting it straight in expedition;' 'God before,' he says several times, he will come to take his right. He orders his old friend Bardolph to be pitilessly executed for robbing a church; he wishes all such offenders to be cut off; for he well knows that when 'lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner.' We have seen him previous to the battle in solemn preparation, and engaged in edifying conversation with his soldiers. His first word on the certainty of the victory is—'Praised be God, and not our strength, for it!' When he reviews the greatness of the victory, he says again: 'Take it, God, for it is only thine!' And that this is in earnest, he orders even death to be proclaimed to any who may boast of it or take the honour from God. At his triumphial entry into London he forbids the sword and helm, the trophies of his warlike deeds, to be borne before him; and the poet says expressly of him, in the prologue, what once the prince had said of himself on that day at Shrewsbury over Percy's body—that he was 'free from vainness and self-glorious pride, giving full trophy, signal, and ostent, quite from himself to God.' The atonement which his father could not attain to, for want of energetic, persevering, inward

stimulus, is accomplished by him. In his prayer to God before the battle, when he wishes that 'the sense of reckoning' may be taken from his soldiers and that his father's fault may not be thought upon, he declares that he has 'interred anew' Richard's body, has wept over it and has ordered masses to be said; that he has five hundred poor in yearly pay, 'who twice a day their withered hands hold up toward Heaven' for him. The poet, we see plainly, adheres to the character of the age, and invests Henry with all that outward work of repentance which in that day was considered necessary for the expiation of a crime. To many he will appear to have gone too far in this, both as regards his hero, who is otherwise of so unshackled a mind, and himself, rising as he does generally so far above the narrow views of his own, to say nothing of older times. But above this objection, also, the poet soars victoriously in those excellent words which he puts into the mouth of the king at the close of that penitential prayer:—

> More will I do;
> Though all that I can do is nothing worth,
> Since that my penitence comes after all,
> Imploring pardon.

Shakespeare has in no wise attributed to the king this pious humility and fear of God as an occasional quality, upon which he places no more value than upon any other; we see from the repeated reference to it, we see from the nature of the character and its consequent bearing in various circumstances, we see from the plan of the whole play, that this trait is intended to form the central point of the whole. The poet works with the same idea in which Æschylus wrote his warlike pieces, the Persians and the Seven before Thebes: namely, that terrible is the warrior who fears God, and that on the other hand the blossom of pride ripens into the fruit of evil and the harvest of tears. For entirely in this sense has Shakespeare depicted the camp of the French and their princes, in Xerxes-like arrogance and crime, in opposition to the little troop of Britons and their intrepid pious hero. He shows this arrogance in their dividing the lion's skin before the hunt; in the French king wishing to bring the English prince in a chariot captive to Rouen; in the Dauphin, in derision of his youthful tricks, sending a tun of tennis-balls to the man who is pondering with such anxious conscientiousness his articles of war; in their playing at dice beforehand for

'the low-rated English;' in their bribing the English nobles with money to murder their king. Shakespeare's age designated that impious reliance on human power by the name of *security*, and this bold confidence in their number and this proud contempt of the enemy is imputed by the poet to the French camp. With arrogant desire they long for the day which the English are awaiting in suspense and doubt; they spend the night in noise and din which the English pass waking in uneasy calmness, and in edifying preparation; they sparkle with shining weapons, and they boast of splendid steeds, while 'the beggared host' of the Britons go in war-worn coats and ride famished horses; they look down with haughty boasting on the heads so heavily armed yet devoid of 'intellectual armour,' and compare their fool-hardy courage to that of their mastiffs; while the English, as if the king had imparted his soul to them, calm in their anxiety, gather rather fresh courage from necessity, self-respect, and fidelity. Among the French leaders there is hardly one who does not vie with another in empty boasting and bragging; not one who does not share the childish delight in dress and military decoration, not one whom the seriousness of things can draw away from insipid witicisms and vain debates, not one who showed even a tinge of the seriousness and of the calm courage and devotion of the English. But the Dauphin surpasses them all in shallow self-complacency, in frivolous arrogance, and in this merry bragging from natural narrowness of capacity. These scenes, if only from the broken French introduced, border on caricature; Shakespeare here, if anywhere, has fallen too easily into a weakness of the age. It seems to me more than probable that a jealous patriotic feeling actuated our poet in the entire representation of his Prince Henry: the intention, namely, of exhibiting by the side of his brilliant contemporary, Henry IV. of France, a Henry upon the English throne equal to him in greatness and originality. The greatness of his hero, however, would appear still more estimable if his enemies were depicted as less inestimable. It alone belonged to the ancients to honour even their enemies. Homer exhibits no depreciation of the Trojans, and Æschylus no trace of contempt of the Persians, even when he delineates their impiety and rebukes it. In this there lies a large-hearted equality of estimation, and a nobleness of mind, far surpassing in practical morality many subtle Christian theories of brotherly love. That Shakespeare distorts the French antagonists, and could not even get rid of his Virgil-

taught hatred against the Greeks, is one of the few traits which we would rather not see in his works; it is a national narrow-mindedness, with which the Briton gained ground over the man. The nations of antiquity, who bore a far stronger stamp of nationality than any modern people, were strangers to this intolerant national pride; even the Romans were so; on their triumphal arches they fashioned the statues of captive barbarian monarchs, noble in outward form, and showing in their whole bearing all the hostile defiance of independence.

Shakespeare has in this play also brought the popular king Henry into close contact with the people; his society is, however, now wholly different to that of his youth. At that time extravagance and idleness, thieving and loitering, were placed by his side, in order to make the contrast more sensible of his own occasional participation in the wantonness of the others; now the poet has found it necessary to present a wholly different contrast, designed to show us that his new moral severity and religious character rest not on the mechanism of an ecclesiastical habit, and that the free-spirited youth has in no wise become an old devotee. Shakespeare could not dare to exhibit the plain contrast of a religious bigot; the religious spirit and puritanical strictness of the age did not permit it; the whole English stage of the period never ventured, to my knowledge, to portray a character even slightly tinged with religious bigotry. Shakespeare therefore has rather exhibited by the side of the king the worldly aspect of an austerity and conscientiousness of this kind; he displays it as grown into a habit, respectable but not too accountable, so that we at once feel the contrast to the unshackled mind of his hero, in whom religious fervour, like each of his qualities, was developed according to the nature of circumstances; in whom it became apparent before, over the body of Percy, at the tidings of his father's illness, and as early as at that first soliloquy upon the crown; in whom it now blazes forth more brightly on the great occasion of a war between two mighty states, at an undertaking in which the boldest is reminded of his dependence on external powers. Among the more serious popular characters—the steady, worthy Gower, the rough Williams, and the dry Bates—the Welshman Fluellen, the king's countryman, is the central point. He is, as the king himself says, a man of 'much care and valour,' but 'out of fashion.' Compared with the former companions of the Prince, he is like discipline opposed to licence, like pedantry opposed to dis-

soluteness, conscientiousness to impiety, learning to rudeness, temperance to intoxication, and veiled bravery to concealed cowardice. Contrasted with those boasters, he appears at first a 'collier' who pockets every affront. In common with his royal countryman, he is not what he seems. Behind little caprices and awkward peculiarities is hidden an honest, brave nature, which should be exhibited by the actor, as it was by Hippisley in Garrick's time, without playfulness or caricature. Open and true, he suffers himself to be deceived for a time by Pistol's bragging, then he seems coldly to submit to insult from him, but he makes him smart for it thoroughly after the battle, and then gives him 'a groat to heal his broken pate.' He settles the business on which Henry sets him against Williams and which brings him a blow, and when the king rewards Williams with a glove full of crowns, he will not be behind in generosity, and gives him a shilling. He speaks good and bad of his superiors, ever according to truth, deeply convinced of the importance of his praise and blame, but he would do his duty under each. He is talkative in the wrong place, takes the word from the lips of others, and is indignant when it is taken from him; but in the night before the battle he knows how to keep himself quiet and calm, for nothing surpasses to him the discipline of the Roman wars, in which this is enjoined. The cold man flashes forth warmly like the king when the French commit the act, so contrary to the law of arms, of killing the soldiers' boys. At the time of his respect for Pistol, the latter begs him to intercede for the church-robber Bardolph, but he made his appeal to the wrong man. It is a matter of discipline, in which Fluellen is inexorable. Indeed he especially esteems his countryman king for having freed himself of these old companions. This is the essential point to him in his learned comparison between Henry V. and Alexander the Great, that the latter killed his friends in his intoxication, while the former turned away his when he was in 'his right wits.' Since then his countryman is inscribed in his honest scrupulous heart, though before he had certainly made little of the dissolute fellow; now he cares not who knows that he is the king's countryman, he needs not to be ashamed of him 'so long as his majesty is an honest man.' Happy it is that the noble Henry can utter a cordial amen to this remark, 'God keep me so;' his captain Fluellen would at once renounce his friendship if he learned from him his first dishonourable trick. The self-contentedness

of an integrity, unshaken indeed, but also never exposed to any temptation, is excellently designed in all the features of this character.

The pedantic-like discipline and love of order, the valour by line and level of the brave Fluellen, though it may appear in an old-fashioned light compared with the well-based and free virtue of the king, stands out on the other hand by its unassuming nature in advantageous contrast to the worthlessness of his boasting companions, Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph. The poet allows us through them to have another glimpse of the early intercourse of the prince. At the commencement of the important period they appear a little elevated, but circumstances again ruin them. Their seducer Falstaff is no longer with them; a better spirit accompanies them in the boy, whom we venture to take for the page in the second part of Henry IV., and who honourably falls in battle with the boys. He characterises his three companions, whom he thought of leaving, so distinctly that we require no other analysis. They are soon again 'sworn brothers in filching,' and Bardolph and Nym bring themselves to the gallows. As a proof that Shakespeare has not made the king act inconsiderately to Falstaff (who in the Chronicle also appears as a strict lover of justice), he makes him say expressly, at Bardolph's fall, that he 'would have all such offenders so cut off.' Pistol is not so bold a thief as they, and he is, therefore, dismissed with the more lenient lesson from Fluellen, who makes him eat his Welsh leek, and 'cudgels his honour' from his limbs. The poet did not again introduce the fat Falstaff; we hear only of his death. From the epilogue to Henry IV. it was undoubtedly Shakespeare's intention to let him appear in this piece also. During the work itself he must have discovered that this was no longer practicable. He could only have exhibited him in ever greater debasement, and this would have destroyed the symmetry and the great design of the play. The poet, however, by this omission, remained in debt, as it were, to the public; and he seized therefore an opportunity, not long afterwards, of liquidating it in another manner by writing the Merry Wives of Windsor, in which he once again, in strict ethical development of the character, makes 'plump Jack' appear as the principal figure.

KING JOHN.

KING JOHN is mentioned in Meres' well-known list of Shakespeare's plays in 1598, and thus appeared *previous* to that year, as Delius supposes, between the completion of the York and the beginning of the Lancaster tetralogy, not long before 1596. As in Richard II., there is little place given to the prose, and in one passage rhyme has maintained its ground. Plays upon words and conceits in unsuitable places are even more frequent here than in Richard II., a piece with which King John appears to be almost contemporary, if it were only on account of the great family resemblance between the character of Constance and that of Richard II.

There is an old piece, '*Kynge John*,' by Bishop Bale, which at the latest was written at the commencement of the reign of Elizabeth; but it was not only unknown to Shakespeare, but also to the author of the older two-sectioned dramatic history of King John, out of which Shakespeare produced his work. This older play exists in many impressions, the first of which is dated 1591, and the third (of 1611) erroneously bears the name of Shakespeare on the title-page. Shakespeare entirely followed this older work in the historical matter, and there is scarcely more than one passage to be pointed out with certainty in which it may be concluded that he consulted the Chronicles besides. Artistically considered, he took in the outward design of the piece, blended both parts into one, adhered to the leading features of the characters, and finished them with finer touches; more freely, and now indeed more completely as himself, he treated this preparatory work in the same way he had before done more timidly the last two parts of Henry VI. To compare the older King John with Shakespeare's is a task which far more rewards the trouble than the comparison of Henry VI. with its original, because in King John the maturer

poet revised a work at any rate as good in itself. The older King John is a rough but not a bad piece, from which the poet could have borrowed many happy poetical and historical features. It possesses the old stiffness and is intermingled with Latin passages according to the earlier custom, yet it is freer from the extravagances of the old school, from which these historical subjects in a great measure rescued us. The diffuseness in the second part is heavy, and here Shakespeare with excellent tact has remedied the evil by abridgment. The characters are designed in a manner suitable for our poet's use, but they are far less sustained than his. For the mere sake of speaking, speeches are put in the lips of Faulconbridge which are inconsistent with his nature. Arthur, who once speaks in the childlike tone of his age, loses it again, and in the pathetic scene with Hubert is a precocious disputant. How far Shakespeare excelled his best contemporary poets in fine feeling is evinced by this older play if it be compared with his revised work. Shakespeare delineates his Faulconbridge (and himself in him) rigidly and bitterly enough as a good Protestant in the base treatment of Popish arrogance. In suitable passages he gives full vent to the indignation of the English at Popish rule and intrigue, encroachment and oppression, which at that time was readily listened to in London. But he did not go so far as to make a farce of Faulconbridge's extortions from the clergy; the old piece offered him here a scene in which merry nuns and brothers burst forth from the opened coffers of the 'hoarding abbots,' a scene certainly very amusing to the fresh Protestant feelings of the time, but to our poet's impartial mind the dignity of the clergy, nay even the contemplativeness of cloister-life, was a matter too sacred for him to introduce it in a ridiculous form into the seriousness of history. There are many similar crudenesses in the old piece, which Shakespeare has likewise effaced. At the marriage treaty between Lewis and Blanche, the poor Constance is present; at the indelicate discussion (Act I. sc. 1) between the brothers Faulconbridge, their mother is introduced; the illegitimate son subsequently threatens his own mother with death if she does not confess the truth to him; this lack of tenderness does not occur in Shakespeare. In another respect also the accurate comparison of the two works is of the greatest interest, if we would watch Shakespeare's depth in the treatment of his poetry, as it were, in the work and in the creation itself. In many

passages of the old play, where motives, delineation of character and actions, lay before him in ample prolixity, he has gathered the contents of whole scenes compactly into a single sentence or a single insinuation; he disdains superabundant perspicuity, and leaves to the actor, the spectator, and the reader somewhat for his own mind to find out and to add. If we interpret as much out of such scanty hints as all penetrating commentators of Shakespeare feel themselves obliged to do, we prepare the way for an impression of unwarranted imputations of greater wisdom and fulness than the poet intended. But these comparisons prove to us only too plainly that we can never go too far in truly fathoming this poet; that far rather we have to labour to find out what lies concealed in him; and that we have only to guard ourselves from interpolating his sentiments with philosophical maxims and reflections which were foreign and remote to him as well as to his age.

King John has outwardly no reference to the two historical tetralogies which we have previously discussed; but, with regard to the idea it contains, we shall see the poet in this play also working with the same political views which distinguish the cycle of ideas in the histories from that of the exact dramas. If we turn away from the historical subject, we might pronounce this piece to be a tragedy of the purest water, simply representing the idea of so many of the ancient tragedies: that 'there is no sure foundation set in blood; no certain life achieved by others' death.' But to this general idea the purport of the whole play does not pervadingly refer. A rich web of political actions, aiming at one central point, circles round Arthur's death, which forms indeed the main turning-point of John's fortune, though it is in no wise the sole cause of this reverse of fortune, any more than the guilt of the king alone is so; but from these political actions is developed, as in Richard II., an idea at once political and ethical, as special in character as the leading thoughts of all Shakespeare's real and strict historical plays.

The political actions to which we refer relate to the disputed throne of England. After the death of Richard Cœur-de-Lion, in virtue of a testament of this king, and at the instigation of the queen-mother Elinor, the rightful heir of England, the young Arthur of Bretagne, is excluded from the throne, and Richard's brother John becomes his successor. The old Elinor—an offence to morality, as Constance upbraids

her in our present play and as history exhibits her—an Ate, as the play names her, who in the reign of her husband, Henry II., stirred up the sons against their father, as she now did the dying Richard against the lawful heir—this Elinor is the political genius and guide of her son John. His succession serves her ambition and gratifies her hatred of Arthur's mother, Constance, who, according to Elinor's declaration, sought on her side the throne for her son only with the ambitious design of ruling herself and 'kindling all the world.' Constance and her adherents call John a base usurper; John at first, in opposition to his mother, seems to trust his right as much as 'his strong possession;' but his mother whispers in his ear as a secret that his throne rests more on strong possession than on right. The testament of the former king, which she has procured, and its judicial validity, rest as the dubious point between the indubitable right of Arthur[1] and the usurpation of John. On his side is the actual possession, on Arthur's and his mother's the armed assistance of an apparently generous friend, the King of France. We shall see how fate inclines in this well-balanced strife, how fortune ebbs and flows, how combinations and political intrigues intersect each other, and how the poet steers his way amid all these vicissitudes and intricacies. First of all we must become acquainted with the principal characters, which stand opposed to each other on both sides.

Throughout this play Shakespeare has softened for the better the traits of the principal political characters, and has much obliterated the bad. His John, his Constance, his Arthur, his Philip Augustus, even his Elinor, are better people than they are found in history. The ground of this treatment, which is not usual to him, is not merely that in this instance he did not draw directly from the sources of the Chronicle; his design in it was also, as will appear in the course of our considerations, that the vehicles of the political story should be merely men of ordinary stamp, deriving the motives for their

[1] The following genealogical table makes the relation plain: Henry II. (Elinor, separated from Lewis VII. of France).

Henry † 1183.	Richard Cœur-de-Lion. † 1199.	Geoffrey of Bretagne (Constance).	King John	Eleanor (Alfonso of Castile).
	Bastard Philip Faulconbridge.	Arthur.	Henry III.	Blanche.

actions from no deep-lying passions; men neither of a very noble nor of a very ignoble sort, but, as is generally the case in the political world, men acting from selfishness and common interest. The base previous history of Elinor and Constance is touched upon only in cursory insinuations, or is entirely overlooked; the older, active Arthur of history is transformed into an inactive, innocent boy; King John himself is kept greatly in the background, and even *his* historical character is softened and refined by Shakespeare. As he appears at the commencement, he is like a vigorous man prepared for everything, resolved with a strong hand to defend his possession of the throne against every assault. He is 'great in thought,' as Faulconbridge subsequently reminds him, referring to this early period; in the thought, he means, of maintaining with all his power against every pretension that English land which actually is on his side and has sworn allegiance to him, and of identifying the kingdom with his country as the straightforward Bastard ever does. He is not the image of a brutal tyrant, but only the type of the hard manly nature, without any of the enamel of finer feelings, and without any other motives for action than those arising from the instinct of this same inflexible nature and of personal interest. Severe and earnest, an enemy to cheerfulness and merry laughter, conversant with dark thoughts, of a restless, excited temperament, he quickly rises to daring resolves; he is uncommunicative to his best advisers, laconic and reserved; he does not agree to the good design of his evil mother that he should satisfy Constance and her claims by an accommodation; it better pleases his warlike manly pride to bear arms against the threatened arms; in his campaigns against Constance and her allies the enemy himself feels that the 'hot haste,' managed with so much foresight, and the wise order in so wild a cause, are unexampled. Thus 'lord of his presence,' and allied to the great interest of the country, he appears feared, but not loved and desired, and he presents in truth no amiable side. No childlike reverence draws him to his mother, but her political wisdom attracts him; no vein of kindred links him with Faulconbridge, but his usefulness is the bond with him; to Hubert he speaks of love when he requires him, and of abhorrence after his services have proved injurious; the property of the church loses its sanctity for him in necessity; but this manner of consulting only his immediate advantage in all circumstances leads him by degrees even to

betray the great possession of the state in another time of need to this same despised and crushed church, whose arrogant interference he had before withstood with scornful defiance. No higher principle sustains the man and his energetic designs in time of danger; the great idea at the outset of his career leaves him during its progress and at its end. After his power, thus displayed against France, has risen even to the defiance of the Pope and the church, and to the inconsiderate design upon the life of a child whose temper was not to be feared and had not been even tried by him, it sinks down, struck by conscience, by curses, and by prophecies, by dangers without and within; he becomes anxious, mistrustful, superstitious, fearful to absolute weakness and to a degree of faint-heartedness, in which he sells his country as cheaply as once in his self-confidence he had held it dearly and had defended it boldly.

In contrast to the entirely political relation between the usurper and his mother is the entirely maternal relation of Constance to her son Arthur, on whose side is the legitimate claim. The suspicious Elinor sees in him 'a bloom that promiseth a mighty fruit;' Shakespeare too has given a profound mental capacity to the pure and spotless mind of the tender boy; in that scene with Hubert, which affects the soul of the spectator with such agitating emotions of fear and pity, it is not alone his loving nature which disarms cruelty, it is also a persuasive spirit full of wise and even cunning precaution, which terror at once ripens into an efficient power. Yet at the time no pretender would have been less to be feared than he. He 'would that he were low laid in his grave,' when he hears the contention over his right. He would gladly be a shepherd, so that he might be merry and free from the unmerited fault of being his father's son and heir. But all the more firmly does his ambitious mother cling to the legitimate claim of the child who knows of no ambition. She has called France to arms for her fair son, whom she loves with all the intensity of maternal pride; she would be less ambitious for herself and him, if nature had not made him so worthy of command. She herself is yet beautiful as a matron, and she takes, it seems, no little delight in the beauty of her child, and, to argue from the impression which she makes on the bystanders, her charms must even in her extreme and utterly unfeigned sorrow enhance the spectacle of her grief. Ambition spurred by maternal love, maternal love goaded by ambition and womanly vanity, these

form the distinguishing features of her character, features out of which, from the adversity of fate, that raging passion is developed which at last shatters the soul and body of the frail woman. She is a woman whose weakness amounts to grandeur, and whose virtues sink into weakness; like John in his masculine sphere, she is without those mental and moral resources which could make her moderate in prosperity or calm in adversity. To the daring man misfortune is the stone against which he stumbles, to the passionate woman this stumbling-stone is prosperity. From the transporting violence of her love and of her grief we may conclude how violent she could have been in hatred and arrogance. Her coarse outbursts against Elinor, her contemptuous and sarcastic outbreaks against the Duke of Austria when she stands on the doubtful ground between success and misfortune, testify to the sanguine, womanly, and even womanish want of self-command, which makes her irritable from fear, and would have made her irritable in prosperity. Her biting speech is even too bitter for her child and too immoderate for her friends. Shakespeare has depicted in her the female counterpart to Richard II., who, imperious in prosperity, was speedily lost in adversity. Powerless to forward their own cause, the one from early self-abandonment, the other from the circumstances of her position and sex, both alike powerless in active defence and revenge, they both exhibit the exaggeration of a passion which rages within the man in smouldering heat, and within the woman in a brightly blazing fire; they both present an exaggeration of the mind and the fancy manifesting itself in the most brilliant outpourings of eloquence and reflection, in the invectives of rage as well as in the outbursts of sorrow. Just as in Richard there gushes forth in Constance a deeply poetic vein in all her misery, and like him her imagination revels in her grief, which she calls so great that 'no supporter but the huge firm earth can hold it up.' Like Richard, she delights in picturing to herself dark images of death and its desired horrors; like him she plays with her sorrow in witty words and similes; like him her pride and majesty rise with misfortune. On the throne and state of her grief she feels herself more exalted than her false royal friends, and in the extreme of hopelessness she is seized with the frenzy which only threatened Richard. As the end, the ruin, and the agony of King John have ever been regarded as one of the most satisfactory themes for English

actors such as Garrick, so from Mrs. Cibber to Mrs. Siddons and later actresses the part of Constance has been esteemed as one of the most acceptable tasks. The change of mood, and the oscillations from the highest pitch of excited bitterness to the softest depth of maternal tenderness, offer infinite scope to the artist. In the third act we must compare the Shakespearian play with the similar scenes in the older King John, in order to estimate thoroughly what he has here accomplished. How the whole frail and trembling frame of the woman is agitated at the first tidings of her forlorn condition! What variety of feeling is expressed and felt in those twenty lines in which she inquires anxiously after the truth of that which shocks her to hear! How her grief, as long as she is alone, restrains itself in calmer anguish, in the vestibule of despair! How her sorrow first bursts forth in the presence of others into powerless revenge, rising even to a curse which brings no blessing to herself, and how atoningly behind all this unwomanly rage lies the foil of maternal love! How justly measured throughout is the light and shade! We should be moved with too violent a pity for this love, leaning as it does on the one dear object which is snatched away from it, if it did not weaken our interest by its want of moderation; we should turn away with disgust from the violence of the woman, if the strength of her maternal affection did not irresistibly enchain us.

These two opponents, unstable and unprincipled as they appear—the one without judgment, dependent on doubtful allies, and the other resting on the wisdom of his relatives—become in conformity with their nature, and in consequence of the alternations of fortune, entangled in a series of unnatural alliances, by which weakness and mistrust in a cause not wholly pure endeavours to find support, and interest strives to counteract interest. John alone appears at the outset master over himself and his country, and hence, firm, quick, and successful. Constance, on the contrary, has formed an unpatriotic league with France, the natural enemy of England, and a yet more equivocal friendship with the Duke of Austria,[1] who, according to the story of the older King John, was the cause of the death of Richard Cœur-de-Lion, the brother-in-law of Constance.

[1] In this character Shakespeare has blended into one person, as in the older King John, Duke Leopold of Austria, who kept Richard in prison in 1193, and Count Vidomar of Limoges, before whose castle, at Chaluz, Richard fell in 1199.

The poet has not expressly pointed out the unnaturalness of this union in a national and domestic point of view, because the passionate woman, a stranger to all political considerations, falls into these errors with the same inconsiderateness as Richard II. does; but the insincerity and weakness of this alliance betrays itself all the more strongly in the manner in which the violent-natured woman bursts forth with scornful hatred against Austria, after he has become faithless. The poet's opinion, moreover, as regards any English league with France, is expressed in King Lear with such severe consistency, and is in this play subsequently shown so forcibly in a second instance, that he could spare himself the lesson on this first occasion. And he did so here all the better because this alliance, seen from the position of France and Austria, has a second side which stands out all the more distinctly. Both fought, as it appears in the beginning, for the good right of an innocent orphan, as the knightly defenders of a feeble woman; Austria, moreover, fought in expiation of the death of Richard, a war at once 'just and charitable;' they derive their authority from the highest Judge, and with better right than John could call themselves the servants of God. The double-sided nature of this alliance is exactly counterbalanced by John's equivocal right; this the poet has shown at its climax in the equal, indecisive battle, and in the position of the town of Angiers between both pretenders. The neutral inhabitants of Angiers, however, propose that France should give his son and John his niece in marriage, and that peace should thus be concluded. With no other motive than the consciousness of his weak right, John adopts these conditions upon the counsel of his mother; had he at first consented to treat with Constance, he could easily have satisfied her with the investiture of the English possessions on the French territory, which he now surrenders to France! To stop Arthur's title to the whole, he gives away part of England's territory to England's worst enemy! And the King of France, moreover, whom Christian love and zeal had at first urged to a war which even Faulconbridge declares 'resolved and honourable,' forsakes the right of the widow and orphan, and turns it 'to his own vantage.' But this fair-seeming peace, which John enters into with the perjured, is not to last a single day. That great power, which ever with masterly hand has sought worldly and political advantage in the name of God, interferes between the new-allied. The Pope calls the king to account for spurning

the church, and, upon his defiant reply, pronounces excommunication against him and the dissolution of the league. The Dauphin draws away the French king from England, in spite of his scruples at 'playing fast and loose with faith' and 'jesting with Heaven,' while he impresses upon him the inequality of the gain and loss—on the one side the curse of Rome, on the other the light loss of England's friendship. The poor Blanche falls a sacrifice to political considerations, and to their preponderance over those of home and heart. John, imprudent at first in resting on false supports, is so now in the wicked removal of weak enemies and in the dangerous provocation of opposition. He contrives the murder of the harmless Arthur, and irritates the already disturbed church by fresh extortions. The legate Pandulph, a master of Machiavellian policy, watches these errors, and builds upon them the new unhallowed league between France and Rome; with cold blood he speculates how Arthur's death may be occasioned by a French invasion, and how this again may be advanced by the sensation produced by the murder. 'A sceptre,' he tells the inexperienced Dauphin,

> snatched with an unruly hand,
> Must be as boisterously maintained as gained:
> And he that stands upon a slippery place,
> Makes nice of no vile hold to stay him up.

The anticipated murder of Arthur and the plunder of the church would breed discontent in England; from this 'hurly' the old student of this 'old world' teaches France to draw advantage. This practical prophecy is fulfilled: the country becomes unruly; the king's evil conscience is roused; suspiciously he has himself crowned a second time, and this makes his nobles suspicious also. The murder of Arthur comes to their hearing, and they revolt from the king. A new anti-national league is formed between the English vassals on the one side, and France and the Pope on the other, and the French Dauphin prepares on his part the death of the traitor for all the traitors to England. Meanwhile the fearful and perplexed John loses his old courage and confidence so far that he takes his land as a fief from the Pope, and enters into a shameful treaty of subjection to the most virulent of his enemies. The older play regards this treaty only as a cunning act of dissimulation, but Shakespeare has no longer imputed such a characteristic to the ruined king, but only to the strong, inflexible Faulconbridge.

The king has forgotten his former vigour, which the enemy has now learned from him; he turns his hardened zeal against poor prophets only to benumb his superstitious fear; his energy is gone. The unnaturalness of all these complicated alliances is now speedily manifested; the league between England and the Papacy, that between the Papacy and France, that between France and the English vassals, all are suddenly broken up, without the attainment of the object of one of them; they change throughout into the natural enmity which severed interests necessitate.

Amid these errors and intricacies, these inclinations and aversions, these alliances and quarrels, self-interest and advantage (the rulers of all political affairs) bear sway. Faulconbridge solemnly rebukes this, in the first league between John and France, and in Philip's breach of faith to Constance, as the author of this double godless course of action, as 'that broker that still breaks the pate of faith;' as 'that daily break-vow; he that wins of all;' that cheats all; as

> the bias of the world,
> The world, who of itself is peised well,
> Made to run even upon even ground;
> Till this advantage, this vile drawing bias,
> Makes it take head from all indifferency,
> From all direction, purpose, course, intent.

To this power, to this lever in every commotion, high and low abandon themselves more or less readily. King John and Constance are urged by the force of direct nature, by want of principle, and by lack of moral and patriotic sense, to grasp at its offers; the French princes follow its dictates with a deliberation which overcomes the counterbalance of honour; the Duke of Austria stands ever cowardly near the strong and marches with them; the Papal legate is the master, who thinks to take this moving-power in his hand and to guide after his own intention. In what relation to the seductions of this power, and to its confused world of policy, do those men stand, in whom the fire of morality and of genuine patriotism is not wholly extinguished? Shakespeare has placed this contrast of a better humanity in opposition to those slaves of interest in four gradations.

The young Arthur, in his unspotted innocence, is a stranger to this world of guilt and selfishness. In this strife of hostile powers, only the discord of quarrel meets his ear, and even that

is intolerable to the saintly creature. The superiority of a nature angelic, untried and uninjured, drives the tender being early from the noisy world, for which he has neither understanding nor heart; he spares his keeper Hubert the temptation to an evil deed, while in full consciousness he incurs the danger of the suicide which proves fatal. It happens repeatedly in Shakespeare's plays that childlike innocence meets in this manner with a tragic fate: it is so with the sons of Edward in Richard III., with Macduff's bold and heroic boy, with Mamillius in the Winter's Tale, and here with Arthur. Shakespeare has always painted this innocence in the most charming colours; he has not cast the slightest mote across the moral spotlessness of these characters, but on each occasion he has added the interest of intellectual endowments to them; all these youthful beings are premature in their development and precocious in their minds. How is the pitiable destruction of these creatures consistent with the demands of that poetic justice which lay so near the poet's heart? They could not perish in moral justice; how could we impute guilt to childlike innocence, and demand retribution when no deeds are committed? Nevertheless, in the historical play of Richard III., for example, the death of Edward's sons was imposed upon the poet by his subject; he could not evade it. What measure did he take in order to reconcile feeling and fancy with the cruel destiny? He yielded to the pious popular belief which says that God takes to himself most early the sweetest children, and to that other, so often expressly repeated in Richard, that children 'so wise, so young, do ne'er live long.' He delineated these guiltless souls in such angelic perfection that they appear too good for this lower world; and thus, mingled with sorrow and pity for their end, a feeling of happiness is excited at seeing them withdrawn from the rough contingencies of life. And this poet appeared to Voltaire an intoxicated savage!

It is best for the pure innocent nature to be withdrawn from the confusion of the political world—this is a doctrine taught even by Machiavelli, the master of policy. But it is not every one who is in the position to be withdrawn from it by the force of destiny, or who is able voluntarily to avoid it. A moral nature and national and political duty are at variance in the noble Salisbury, producing in him a struggle of soul which leads to false steps, if such they can be considered;

the right line of action in these political perplexities is expressly represented as one so delicate as not even to be always accurately discovered by the most just sense of morality. When the treachery of France towards Constance and Arthur is committed, Salisbury appears as a man of sensitive feeling, whom this misdeed pierces to the heart; he looks with pity on the wronged prince, and restrains not his tears. When the death of Arthur reaches his ears, he separates himself quickly with other vassals from the king's cause; he will not line the 'thin bestained cloak' of the king with his own pure honour. When they stand altogether before Arthur's corpse, the outburst of his moral abhorrence of this murderous deed makes even the Bastard dumb. He forbids his soul obedience to this bloody man, the smell of sin stifles him, he vows vengeance of the murdered, and enters into league with France, the enemy of England. The sensitiveness of his moral feelings seduces him to a deed which, in a national and political sense, is a crime; but the noble man does it not without a heavy struggle between necessity and honourable motives; the tempest of soul, the great affections wrestling in his bosom, break forth 'in an earthquake of nobility,' and he withdraws to weep the shame of his enforced choice of stepping on the soil of his country in the ranks of her enemies. Scarcely is he subsequently informed that the unnatural league with the national enemy threatens him with death at the hands of this same French Dauphin, who had bestowed on him such high-sounding words of admiration, than he 'untreads the steps of damned flight,' and now leaves his irregular course to return to obedience to the king and his country's cause.

The great vassal is obliged from his mere social position to act from *political* considerations; the lower servant of the king, Hubert, appears only in a *personal* relation to the king. Salisbury endures a bitter struggle between duty to his country and the impulse of a deeply excited abhorrence resting on moral principles; Hubert's struggle only lies between habitual service and a half-wakened sense of conscience which never before had been called forth. The unthinking man, true to his feudal oath, instigated to the murder by a spoken hint from his king, and to the blinding of Arthur by a written command, follows the course of habit in blind obedience, till the sight of Arthur and his supplications awaken in him his slumbering better nature. He seeks to approach the dull but not wholly

inaccessible conscience of the king, that he may effect the rescinding of the command or find excuse for his disobedience. He feels not the sharp goad of moral consciousness which at once separated Salisbury, on account of this murder, from his fidelity to the king. He revolts not from the king, as the other did, from the higher impulse of obedience to the divine law; he preserves himself from a breach with his country, but the stain of the suspicion, for which the revolted vassals threaten him with death, cleaves to him. It is very skilful how afterwards the Count Melun betrays the treacherous designs of the Dauphin against these English vassals, partly on account of his English descent, partly, and this touch Shakespeare added to the older play, *for love of Hubert.* This reflects a respect for the man whom they had too readily condemned, who now becomes their preserver owing to his nobler nature, in the same measure as before, in the plot against Arthur, which the king, building upon his rough exterior, committed to him, he had become an accessory to his death.

The gentle Arthur perished in the political struggles in which he was placed; the manly Salisbury was misled in his political path by the delicacy of his moral feeling; the rougher Hubert erred in his higher moral duty from his faithful zeal; the Bastard Faulconbridge is carried through all these disturbances by his upright patriotic spirit, his sound understanding, and an acute moral instinct of not too tender a texture. The poet makes him not only look steadily at the pole-star, which can alone lead in these intricacies of political life, but he has also designed in his character that kind of nature which is best qualified for this unerring steering through a stormy and dangerous sea. Among Shakespeare's humorous characters, the Bastard Faulconbridge is one in which the poet does not separate the spirit of seriousness and mirth as in most of the others, giving to the latter usually the preponderance, but he exhibits them both in a close and well-balanced combination. His mode of expression throughout, even in the most elevated and most solemn passages, is that of a sceptic, habituated to wit and bitter sarcasm. But placed as he is by fate at the very outset in the busy political world, occupation and work leave him no time to indulge this merry vein, and his deep seriousness in action counterbalances his idle inclination to trifle and to jest. His course through the tragic events, offering so little food to comic humour, is the very reverse to that of King John. The

latter begins with power and kingly thoughts and ends in weakness, the Bastard bounds light of heart into the wider sphere that opens before him, and advances steadily in seriousness and strength even to a tragic greatness. In his first soliloquy he looks jestingly upon his new dignity; his merriment is changed to bitter irony in the second soliloquy (Act II. sc. 2) after the sad experience of the French breach of faith with Constance; in the third soliloquy the gloomy course of events leads him to serious reflection; and at last, ever increasing in power and personal importance, he wholly assumes the direction of the great concerns of the State, and concludes with the tragic resolve, which Shakespeare, in an antique grandeur of sentiment has imputed to all his faithful servants, to Horatio and to Kent, and here also to Philip, to follow his deceased king. The metal out of which this character is moulded is of a similar masculine character as in John. The older play furnished the die for the character, Shakespeare fashioned it into a true work of art. Even there he is depicted as a bold madcap, rude and daring; he is a wild intrepid warrior, whose defiance amounts to proud boasting; he has a straightforward and hearty sense for nature; he is coarse-grained in understanding and in morals; a contrast to crafty, considerate diplomatists, and faithless wranglers, to all custom and cenventionality; 'a bastard to the time' which is regulated by such arts, just as he is a bastard by birth. Shakespeare, in this character also, is occupied with the idea of show and reality, of genuine nature, conventionality, and prejudice. Faulconbridge is in the rare position of being permitted, as it were, to choose between a legitimate birth from an indifferent father, or an illegitimate one from the famous Cœur-de-Lion. This first introduction at once developes his character, which clings rather to substantial honour than to conventional form. He is more proud of a descent, shameful in the eyes of the world, from a great and famous father, than of an honourable legitimate descent from an insignificant father; he prefers a full-face from the mighty hero, than a 'half-face' like his brother from lawful birth. His domestic position bears a resemblance to the historical circumstances of King John. He is the eldest son and heir of his alleged father, but the younger brother charges him with illegitimacy, and thus threatens his inheritance. The Bastard would fain preserve his property and the honour of his mother; he would also fain have so glorious a king for his father. His sound feeling decides

in favour of devotion towards so noble a father and an hereditary honour which promises to call him to still higher honour; and he *rejects* legitimacy of birth, his mother's honour, inheritance, possession, and interest. He flatters himself that he is, what John also calls himself, 'lord of his presence,' and that he may thank his merits for his success, as John might have done had he continued as noble-minded in his kingly calling as at the outset. The coarse moral of the Bastard, which he utters like a catechism, suits both alike equally: 'What though?' he says,

> Something about, a little from the right,
> In at the window, or else o'er the hatch:
> Who dares not stir by day must walk by night,
> And have is have, however men do catch:
> Near or far off, well won is still well shot,
> And I am I, howe'er I was begot.

It is suitable to this worldly, unamiable, but respect-compelling man, so far removed from a subtle morality, but still more inaccessible to all dishonour, that the poet only makes him occasionally think of being religious, that he imputes an excessive reverence for the church to him as little as to John, that he twice gladly and successfully executes the king's command to lay the clergy under contribution, and to shake their bags; that he upholds the defiance of his prince towards the Pope, only that his opposition is more contemptuous and is exhibited in a time of misfortune and danger, while John only ventures upon it in prosperity. If we would personify the English national character, if we would sketch the idea of John Bull according to the then existing condition of the popular civilisation and life, we should say that in the plain, blunt unpretending Faulconbridge, in this simple straightforwardness of sound common sense, of hearty ability and natural cheerfulness and wit, the traits of the national English character are gathered together just as we should expect in a tragedy of this purport, in which this representative of the people is assigned the task of deciding for the popular welfare in those critical political transactions in which the bad are ruined and the good confounded.

Let us follow in conclusion this genuine son of England on his way through the rugged intricacies of that policy, into the midst of which he finds himself drawn by his original union with the king. We meet with him first considering himself in

his knightly dignity, in his 'new-made honour' which will never 'fit' him; the genuine sons of the age and their manners, which he must now adopt, are as repugnant to him as his feeble brother; but he means to familiarise himself with this poison, not for the sake of practising to deceive, but to avoid deceit. He then follows the course of the war until John's league with France, which deprives England of a part of her possessions, and Constance of the help of France. Neutral himself, he utters here the judgment of unerring uprightness against this 'mad composition,' in which John divides his property and France defiles her honour. His soliloquy at the close of the second act (Shakespeare's addition entirely) severely points out the god of this world, that selfish desire of gain which is the cause of all these intricacies; he himself will 'worship' him, for he sees that all bow before the idol. But at the time that he gave his land to his brother for unsubstantial honour, he too well proved that he was not made for this idol-worship. The old play makes Faulconbridge in this scene in love with Blanche; Shakespeare judiciously omitted this trait, that the Bastard's judgment, which should guide us in all these matters, might not in any way be injured by personal interest; his fierce attack upon Austria, in the spirit of the enemy Constance, is thus the wholly pure expression of honourable disgust at unnatural alliances, aye, of joy at their interruption, and of design in their dissolution. The time comes when the vassals of John revolt on account of Arthur's death. He stands agitated over the bloody and condemned deed, but he is cautious of conceding the point to the Barons before he receives full explanation. He will not provoke them still more to defection from their country—a step which he would not even justify if the murder were proved. For this reason he turns upon Hubert all the condemnation of his judgment, if he has done the deed; he believes the voice of honour when Hubert denies it. His fidelity to the king goes too far for him to break it, like Salisbury, for the sake of an unproved accusation; but never would it have gone to such a point as Hubert's, silently and obediently to receive a command or a hint like that of the murder of Arthur. But the intricacies of the matter are felt by this man, formerly so sure of his path, no less than by the others; he fears to lose his way among the thorns and dangers of this world; he calls him happy, 'whose cloak and cincture can hold out this tempest;' he sees that on

no side is honour and blessing to be gained. He shows at once, on the next occurrence, how little he, the king's most faithful servant, is the king's flatterer. He does not conceal from him his political blame upon his disgraceful alliance with Rome; it seems insufferable to the patriot that weapons of offence should be met with good words and compromises, that a 'cockered silken wanton' like the Dauphin should 'flesh his spirit in a warlike soil'! He recalls the king's old intrepidity and confidence, and vicariously assumes these qualities, when he sees them lost in the king. It is not the king but he, who now watchful, 'towers like an eagle over his aiery, to souse annoyance that comes near his nest.' He hastens, as much as lies in his power, to destroy the league between his king and the Pope, as he had before interrupted the peace between him and France; at the same time he calls the rebel nobles to duty and to shame, 'the Neroes, ripping up the womb of their dear mother England.' In the same way his exhortation to them, when they have returned in repentance, is that they should 'push' destruction and perpetual shame out of the weak door of the fainting land. So long as the king's command is not at variance with the divine command, he identifies throughout the king with the country. The king's evil star begins to shine when he sins against his country in the French contract of marriage; he meets with his tragic fall at the instigation of the church, when he was betraying his country to this very church; and in the same manner no blessing can rest on Constance's claim to the throne, when she is in league with the enemy of the land. The king's crime against his country thus falls upon his own head; but the king's crime, such is Faulconbridge's opinion, is not to be expiated by his country. He, therefore, holds to him through thick and thin; 'something about, a little from the right, are the same to him; the preservation and strength of the land is more to him than the lawful right to the crown, which he sees in Arthur; many thousand cares he sees at hand in the vast confusion, but the greatest to him is that heaven itself frowns upon the land. In this position he acts according to that maxim of Bacon: 'God takes care of the world, take thou care of thy country.' For its safety he stretches every nerve, and most of all when he sees the king most fallen. The feeling for his country binds him to the king, when the sense of law and morality loosens Salisbury from him; each of them knows that he is only halfway on the right path; the Bastard exe-

crates the murder and curses the subjection to Rome, Salisbury weeps manly tears over the necessity for a state crime, by which he would save his country. The moral finer-feeling man commits the greater political error, the greater politician takes the side less morally pure, but in perfect firmness of conviction that in such conflicts the country and its independence and preservation is the only way-mark to follow, and that for patriots the foundation of all virtue is persistent steadfastness, which in the service of the fatherland can invest even moral transgression with nobility. He perceived selfishness, interest, and advantage to be the star which governs the political world; if it be so, then as a last resort the advantage of the country should be that before which all others are to be silent. In the opinion of the poet, therefore, as well as of Faulconbridge, no foreign policy and no hostile sword should heal domestic wounds. Hearty unity with a natural enemy is of no value to him, and the national discontent at the league with foreign propaganda, though it may be formed even against tyranny and arbitrariness at home, is to him a sight full of ignominy and dishonour. A lesson grandly inculcated upon us Germans, who will have no state, nor politics, nor common nationality, nor public welfare, until we understand how to apply to ourselves the conclusion of this play, which is at the same time the soul of it:—

> This England never did, nor never shall,
> Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
> But when it first did help to wound itself.
> Now these her princes are come home again,
> Come the three corners of the world in arms,
> And we shall shock them. Nought shall make us rue,
> If England to itself do rest but true.

III. COMEDIES.

THE four comedies in which Shakespeare rises to a higher degree of refinement and elegance than in his earlier ones—in which his wit and mirth sparkle most brightly, and in which the fewest serious scenes occur to disturb the comic key-note—lie between the second and third periods of his poetry. The Merry Wives of Windsor was written, according to the epilogue to Henry IV., after that piece (1598), and before 1602, when it first appeared in print. As You Like It is not mentioned in the Meres' list of Shakespeare's plays in 1598; it must therefore fall between this year and 1600, when it is named in a notice of the Booksellers' Register of August 4. Much Ado About Nothing is noticed at the same time in the records of the Booksellers' Company, and What You Will, according to the concurrent opinion of almost all editors, likewise belongs to the year 1600 or 1601. Following closely upon this merry group, Measure for Measure—written somewhat later, about 1603—has indeed the air of a more serious drama, and thus may afford us an easy transition to the tragedies of the third period. In the four comedies prose decidedly predominates, more so than in other plays of our poet, which, from the date of their origin, lie remote from this group. This prose diction, so masterly in Shakespeare's pen, adds extraordinarily to the freedom of the dialogue and to the versatility of the wit.

At the termination of this series of the Shakesperian comedies with the last-named drama, Measure for Measure (which more than any other play of the poet combines the nature of comedy and tragedy), we feel ourselves involuntarily called upon to cast a glance of inquiry upon the various dramatic styles; to see how they were formed under Shakespeare's hands, and whether, with respect to their distinction, a law may be deduced from his own practice, and if so, what this law may be. The result of this consideration is an æsthetic theory

as full of simplicity as of profound thought; and this at the same time introduces us to the ethical theory, that is, to the poet's view as to the moral nature of man. Both theories are so extraordinarily plain—the practical part of art and life is so much at the root of both—that we must confess they rest, if not exclusively, yet far more on pure intention and healthful instinct than on abstract reflection. Man's sense of his value and vocation was considered by Shakespeare as the true ground and soil in which all human virtues and crimes have their root. Wherever it exhibits itself in pure, noble self-reliance, as in Henry Monmouth, Portia, or in Leonatus Posthumus in Cymbeline—who through trials and waverings attain that beautiful medium between over-strained and enervated feeling, between freedom and coercion, between natural unrestraint and weakness of will, and between jest and earnest—there Shakespeare sees the character and nature of man at its height; characters of this kind he represents in an even serious tone, in those dramas which we call *Schauspiele*, dramas which have the serious turn of the tragedy and the cheerful conclusion of the comedy. When this self-reliance rises into egotism, ambition, and love of fame—into those powerful passions which exceed all bounds and come to an unhappy end, for its poetic representation—*tragedy* appears, in which the poet, with wisely balanced admiration and caution, points out to us the greatness and the danger of this overweening nature. When, on the other hand, man's self-reliance sinks into self-love, vanity, and conceit—when the passions shrink into littleness, and the trivialness of the aims are at variance with the importance of the effort—then *comedy* makes its appearance, as the style that nature herself indicates; a style in which the poet strikes with unimpeachable justice at the littlenesses and ridiculousnesses of this contracted humanity, at its caprices, faults, and weaknesses; and this he does with a good-nature, gentleness, and forbearance, which testify to his sparing consideration of the frailty of human nature, and which do the more honour to the poet the more severe throughout is his view of the moral duty of man.

It is not difficult to trace back Shakespeare's truly tragic characters and their motives for action almost everywhere to the one fundamental principle of egotism, and the comic ones to that of self-love; the varieties and shades of these qualities form the diversity in this general harmony. With regard to comedy, with which we shall next concern ourselves, we have

already had occasion to see, and we shall find it throughout occupied with exposing self-love, its self-deceptions and its attempts to deceive others, with unveiling the discrepancy between real and feigned character, with unmasking vanity in fancied gifts, and conceit of vain ones. Setting aside the plays of the first period, in the Two Gentlemen of Verona, the prominent self-love of Proteus is the central point of action. In Love's Labour's Lost, self-love is manifested in the self-pleasing vain desire of fame shown by the Navarrese lords and their caricatured associates. In All's Well that End's Well, the deeper trait of proud self-sufficiency in Bertram at once interferes with the comic character. In the Merry Wives of Windsor, we shall see that the harmless side of Falstaff's egotism, his conceit of his person, is the ground of the laughable occurrences. Finer and more complicated is the nature of the three purer comedies which next lie before us for consideration. In As You Like It, the comedy only glances reprovingly upon the maidenly pride of Phœbe and the self-love which suffers shipwreck in the surfeited Jaques; the character of the principal persons is exactly opposed to all self-love; the little merry plot, therefore, is unfolded only with a pleasant humour, which claims for the play rather the name of a pastoral than of a comedy. In Much Ado About Nothing, Claudio's sensitiveness upon honour is based upon self-love, and by this his changeable humour is nurtured; it produces in Benedick and Beatrice that contempt of the other sex, and that fickle abandonment of their own principle, which is the fruit of this exaggerated pride. In Twelfth Night above all, we shall perceive most clearly how in the most different degrees, in its coarsest and finest features, self-love forms the soul of the prominent characters, and how deeply it is interwoven with the main idea of the piece. For throughout (this is apparent from the hints we have already given respecting the last-mentioned plays, as it was to us from former analyses) this distinguishing feature of the real comic characters in Shakespeare's comedies is interwoven with a special ethical situation, varied and fashioned according to the idea which, in spite of the most intentional removal of all didactic reflections, penetrates and connects the comedies of the poet just as much as the tragedies.

It might be considered unnatural that in the free action of his comedies Shakespeare should throughout have worked in accordance with such a leading idea fixed beforehand. But

whenever we speak of the leading ideas of Shakespeare's plays, we never mean that the poet in any of his works has embodied an abstract idea, over which with systematic calculation and deliberation he has thrown a poetic form. The poet had gone through great inward experiences, concerning which he had taken counsel with himself; he had read narratives in poems, plays, and romances, or he had observed, in the history of the past and present, events and circumstances which spoke to him and were full of life for him, because he possessed in himself, in his nature, or in his life, some corresponding circumstance which explained them to him; impressions of this kind either received or experienced, and rendered the more active by both these modes of conception, were seized by him for his dramas, and were rounded into an artistic form. And in this task, it must be admitted, he possessed in a wonderfully happy combination the gift of making every part of his poem bear reference to one principal aspect of the given subject, and of forming every character into a distinct relation to it, without however allowing the regulating hand in the machinery of his works to be more seen than was consistent with the poetic illusion. This principal aspect is never of an abstract philosophical nature, but always rather of a moral, psychological one. No narrative or fiction, adapted for dramatic handling, could be brought before the luminous mind of the poet without his discovering in the circumstances and beings out of which the action arose certain conditions, the supposition of which could alone render such an action possible or probable. To comprehend these conditions, to trace them if possible to one main condition, to a given disposition or formation of character in the actors, and at the same time to remove as much as possible all accident, is essential to our perception of that spiritual unity of Shakespeare's plays, which we endeavour to point out, and which, however, nowhere in the least detracts from their lively diversity or their plastic and artistic representation. We shall show that Shakespeare, in some of the sources for his comedies, met with such glaring moralisation, that, as his own Touchstone said, he must have 'broken his shins' against it; in these cases he omitted the moral lecture, but he adhered closely to the moral idea, and more closely than his sources he formed his characters according to the one fundamental feature of the nature which could alone produce these or those actions in these or those beings. He who in

this way, with a sense of truth and with a knowledge of human nature, understands how to search for the substance of any given action or story, will necessarily always perceive a moral, psychological kernel, such as we find in all the Shakespearian works. His contemporaries comprehended this well with the mind, but not with the heart; they did not understand how to make a right use of a right rule. Nevertheless, the æsthetic nature of the time knew no otherwise than that the aim of every drama, and even of every comedy, was to join some moral contemplation to the pastime and amusement by which the weary minds of the spectators were to be refreshed, and the anxious and heavy-hearted would be relieved. Thomas Heywood was even of opinion that the introduction of lovers and fools into comedies was intended to ridicule foolish love and to cure the simplicity and perversity of men. In this dry manner Shakespeare's plays never and nowhere moralise. They evolve a given action, around this they group beings of such a nature as may be necessary to this action, they give to these acting characters motives which are the qualifications for such an action; and only by the estimation and appreciation of these motives is the moral spirit of the poet himself to be perceived.

A closer consideration of our comedies will explain these statements to us by the most delicate exemplifications.

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

We place foremost in our group the Merry Wives of Windsor, although it is scarcely the earliest in the series, because the play is connected with the Lancastrian tetralogy. Halliwell, indeed, when he had the oldest edition of the Merry Wives (the 4to. of 1602) printed in the writings of the Shakespeare Society, endeavoured to place the origin of Henry IV., and therefore also that of this comedy, in the years 1592 or 1593, because in the first of these years a German Duke was in Windsor, to whom free post-horses were promised through a pass of Lord Howard's—an event to which allusion might appear to be made in Act IV. sc. 3 of our play. Nevertheless, this incident may have passed before Shakespeare's mind from some earlier remembrance; it may even have been utterly unknown to him, and the apparent allusion may be mere chance. All internal reasons are against the supposition that the Merry Wives originated earlier than the close of the Lancastrian histories (1599). The form in which we read the piece at the present day, according to the text of the folio edition of 1623, was apparently not borne by it in its first and more imperfect design, which seems preserved in the first quarto edition. Many inaccuracies in the text of this sketch indisputably fall to the charge of the illegal edition, but the carelessness of its composition seems rather occasioned by a hasty preparation of the play, with regard to the origin of which we only possess information of a later date.

In the year 1702 the Merry Wives of Windsor, which was much liked in Charles II.'s time, was remodelled by John Dennis into a piece entitled 'the Comical Gallant.' In his dedication he says that Shakespeare's play was written at the desire of Queen Elizabeth, and in the short time indeed of fourteen days. Rowe added to this tradition the circumstance that her desire had been to see Falstaff in love. This tradition

has in it something so credible that even the severest of the English critics do not venture to disregard it. It may be alleged in *favour* of its correctness that among all the plays of Shakespeare's riper period this is by far the least important. It is designed without any deeper background, without any merit of idea, without pathetic elevation, and without serious passages; it is almost entirely written in prose; it is the only piece of the poet's in which the plot decidedly outweighs the characterisation, the only one which moves in the stratum of plain, common, and homely society. It may be alleged *against* the tradition that the piece appears to be written with the stated object of being a counterpart to Henry V., and in evident continuation of the contrast in the moral development of Falstaff and Henry, which the poet had already begun in the second part of Henry IV. This is the view in which we would exclusively discuss this comedy which, in other respects, however well suited to the stage and full of comic power it may be, offers but little matter for our mode of examination. If the task were really imposed by the queen upon Shakespeare, the play only evidences anew how fruitful he was in expedients, how little satisfied he was with such a superficial theme, and how capable he was of giving it a deeper moral bearing and of linking it most closely with his independent works and with the ethical idea which had actuated him in them.

If the Merry Wives of Windsor stands in close relation to the plays in which Falstaff appeared, it is necessary first of all to establish the position occupied by this comedy, not exactly in the series of the other pieces, but in the order of their contents. Halliwell thinks it probable that the incidents it contains took place after Falstaff's banishment from Court. To this a passage in the older edition is opposed, in which Falstaff exclaims, under Herne's oak, 'I wager, the wild Prince of Wales steals his father's deer.' But even in the last revised edition Master Brook speaks most plainly to Falstaff of his great connections and of his consideration both as to rank and person; and Falstaff himself says, that if his transformation into the fat witch Gillian of Brentford (a well-known character in the literature of the sixteenth century) should 'come to the ear of the Court, they would melt him out of his fat and liquor fishermen's boots with him,' that they 'would whip him with their fine wits, till he were as crestfallen as a dried pear.' The connection with the prince must, therefore, be considered

as still existing; though Falstaff is separated from him as in the second part of Henry IV. If we assume that the period of our comedy is placed immediately before the death of Henry IV., and carries on the scenes between Falstaff and Shallow only in another place and under new circumstances, the difficulties are all solved as soon as we shall have removed the doubts respecting certain characters. Whether Falstaff's page is the same as the one who in Henry IV. is about him, and who in Henry V. belongs to Pistol and Nym, is uncertain; it is best left so; the poet would naturally not unnecessarily multiply the express relations of this comedy to the utterly different historical plays, nor presuppose an acquaintance with the characters. That Shakespeare gave the name Quickly to Dr. Caius' servant, as well as to the Hostess in Henry IV., is strange; that he intended another character in her is clear. Not only are her outward circumstances quite different, not only is she at first quite unknown to Falstaff, but her character also is essentially diverse; similar in natural simplicity, it is true, but at the same time docile and skilful, as the silly deceived wife and widow in Eastcheap never appears. All relating to Falstaff himself is evident. The campaign in the north is over; Falstaff drags on his existence with difficulty at ten pounds a week; Pistol and Nym are off duty and are complete thieves; Falstaff discards them and hands over the 'withered serving man' Bardolph, with whom he had lived so long, to be tapster to the Host of the Garter. The outward dissolution of the merry company round Prince Henry took place in the second part of Henry IV.; here we meet with a further and very significant symptom that it is dissolved also inwardly, and that not merely with the prince. In the young Fenton we become acquainted with a new though former companion of both the prince and Poins; he wooes the rich Anne Page for money, but he soon discovers inner treasures in her which quite transform him; he is the counterpart in private life to the metamorphosis of the prince himself.

From this observation we proceed at once to the central point and main character of our piece. We have seen in the second part of Henry IV. how strictly and decidedly Shakespeare separated the prince and Falstaff outwardly, and led them inwardly by different paths. He intended again to bring forward Falstaff in Henry V., but, as we heard before, he changed his mind. He made the prince in Henry V. accom-

plish for himself his royal campaign and his noble conquest of love, and then to this heroic play he placed in opposition one of a simple homely character, in which Falstaff follows out his old purse-stealing habits in a new form of wooing. He saw himself, however, obliged to place this adventure of Falstaff's previous to Henry's accession to the throne and Falstaff's disgrace, because he must have felt that after this glaring fall, in all the incorrigibleness and decrepitude of his paralytic age, Falstaff must necessarily have been ruined mentally and physically. But he exhibited him as separated from the prince, removed from the ennobling presence of that witty society, wholly abandoned to himself, and sinking to a greater degree than Henry rose; at last even, hardly conceivable as it may appear, utterly fallen in his own estimation. If it is possible to point out this ever increasing decline in Falstaff just as plainly as the growing greatness of Henry, there can be no doubt that this piece was written as a counterpart to Henry V., whether any inducement on the part of the queen may have been furnished or not.

Henry as prince and king, with the most splendid objects for his ambition before him, performed the highest actions of renunciation and self-privation which human power can win from the soul, and his finest deeds and the glory of them he cast from himself upon others, upon visible mortals or invisible powers. Falstaff we have seen throughout turning to the lowest objects of covetousness and concupiscence. His mental power was subordinate to his physical impulses and necessities, every passion was in their service; in our present play even that of love, which in all instances is enlivened by some spiritual spark, but by him is only feigned and pretended for a material purpose. His perfect selfishness referred the whole world and all creatures in it to himself alone, and to the advantage he could draw from them; it appropriated everything to itself, according to his theory of the natural right of animals, without a sense of the rights and possessions of others; it endeavoured to place the basest qualities in a good light, and to stamp cowardice as heroic courage. This egotism had its serious and harmful side, which exhibited Falstaff as the enemy and destroyer of society; it had also its laughable side, which placed him in the first rank of what they call good companions. Both sides of this self-love, the harmful and the ridiculous, we find united in our present play in those wooings and in that

kind of love of which alone he was susceptible. He falls in with two homely simple citizens' wives in Windsor. They afford him a free kind of conversation and a merry humour; this is sufficient for him to look upon them as of the same metal as the women of his former intercourse. He wooes them in disbelief of their morality, and, when he appears to succeed, he believes in his own attractiveness. He aims not at love; he thinks only on artifices for improving his condition. Both the wives keep the keys of the rich gold-coffers of their husbands; only for this reason does he admire women thus far from young, one of whom has already a marriageable daughter; he intends to make them his 'East and West Indies, and to trade to them both.' He believes not in honesty; he looks down contemptuously with his knightly pride on the burgher husbands; they are dace of another kind, which the pike endeavours to snap at in a new manner. It is even too dishonourable for Pistol and Nym to play the pander for so ridiculous a wooer; they had before been always *subject* to Falstaff's honour and conscience, but now he is more coarse in feeling than they, and only when these 'baboons' and rogues venture to rebuke him with their *own* reputation are his feelings roused. It is 'as much as he can do,' he says to Pistol, 'to keep the terms of his honour precise.' He himself sometimes, 'hiding his honour in his necessity, is fain to shuffle and to lurch,' and yet Pistol will 'ensconce his rags' and coarseness under the shelter of his honour against him. We must now observe how he keeps the terms of his honour precise in the transaction which he is contriving. He so far cleverly begins it, that he comes forward to the honest burghers' wives at least in an honest tone; he is not inclined for fulsome flattery; he conceals this behind a masculine nature which does not admit of it. But at the same time he is so careless in his gentlemanliness, that he sends the same letter to both the women. The success which it meets with transports him, but it also deprives him of his senses; his sudden self-complacency makes him quite blind. After his vanity has led him to the monstrous idea of considering himself an object of love, nothing is impossible to him. He accepts all the gross flatteries of Master Brook as pure coin; he does not suffer himself to become suspicious by the strangest commission; he thinks the woman in love with him, though he hears that she is inflexibly honourable towards an ordinary well-grown man. Vanity and pride make him imprudently candid to this stranger

who, it is true, pays him. He has retained his well-known shamelessness which belongs to this candour, but at the same time his judgment forsakes him. Twice he allows himself in the grossest manner to be cheated, bathed, and beaten, without being in the least more heedful of a third trap laid for him; although he said, after the first trick, that if they served him such another, he would have his 'brains taken out and buttered and given to a dog.' The wanton women have conspired against him, his despised servants also, and his page is bribed; though many unequal powers are in arms against him, he surrenders himself to the very weakest, when he has once stumbled over his self-love. Confusion, blows, vapour-baths, and cold baths, loss of money, pinches and burnings, the horns which he had designed for others—all return upon his own head; the consciousness of his guilt, the sudden fascination of his judgment, drive him at the last adventure to believe in and to fear even fairies; he mistakes even the voice of the parson Evans, and thinks him a Welsh fairy! When all is at length unriddled to him, the man who never could attain to a knowledge of himself is ashamed even to self-contempt. When he is thus degraded before himself and in his own judgment, Shakespeare might have hoped to direct the judgment of his spectators with respect to this character more in accordance with his own view. But morally this would have been impossible. On this point he had long ago so sunk that he would not have been perplexed even by the perception that it was just honesty and integrity which had outwitted him. That they all at length assail him, and with the most shocking expressions call him intolerable, old, cold, slanderous, wicked, and given to fornication, all this might not have made him think worse of himself. But on the side of his wit, an impression could still be made upon him. This was the gift by which he felt himself superior to blockheads and equal with the clever. On this very point, which corrupted our own judgment, our judgment was to be rectified; and while the poet lowered him in our estimation in this last recommendatory point, he gave us the surest token that he wished to remove him entirely from our esteem. And thus is it with Falstaff in this play. All become thoroughly weary of him, and when he has lost his last attraction they cast him away. He had thought neither caution nor wit necessary to meet the burghers' honesty and ignorance, and he is bamboozled by both. He is obliged to acknowledge himself that

'wit may be made a Jack-a-Lent, when 'tis upon ill employment;' the crafty wit is made 'an ox and an ass,' the robber is fleeced. It grieves him that ignorance itself is 'a plummet' over him. It grieves him still more that such a simple schoolmaster as the Welshman Evans, who is as ignorant as his childish scholars, should make a fool of him. He finds that his star has forsaken him; '*this is enough to be the decay of lust and late-walking through the realm!*' Thus degraded before himself, he seems so now not only to his companions, but to the reader and the spectator also. The poet has thus gained his end. Hazlitt, the great admirer of this character, now perceives in Falstaff nothing more than a shameless and moreover unsuccessful intriguer, whom wit and words have forsaken; he is, he says, no longer the same man. But we have pointed out the same motives in this as in the former Falstaff; the former was rather never the man which Hazlitt took him to be.

It was unquestionably Shakespeare's intention to repeat here the moral lesson which he had placed in the second part of Henry IV. and in Henry V. He had probably observed effects of his Henry IV. on the stage which did not please him; he therefore set forth in Henry V. the glaring example of punishment in Bardolph and Nym, and here he degrades the fat Falstaff in the highest point of his distinction, that is, in his wit. Possibly enough, Shakespeare himself saw, in actual life, effects produced by this play which startled him and made him speak thus forcibly. For we are well aware that the scenes which he depicted in Henry IV. were in his time not foreign to reality; and that under Elizabeth's rule brawlers were the order of the day, who staked their honour in fighting and quarrelling; lads who styled themselves, like Poins, proper fellows of their hands, when, in Bardolph's technical expression, they 'cozened' on the highway vagabonds who lived on the industry of others, who turned night into day, sought good company in drinking and playing, and bravery in daring and swearing. There appeared in consequence on the stage numbers of those plays of the later school, which entirely consisted of intrigues, bantering, cheating, and jokes of a rude and repulsive nature, the subjects for which moved in the stratum of English burgher life, and represented a very loose morality. It was probably in opposition to these that Shakespeare emphasized so strongly the moral tendency of this play, as far as was practicable with retaining the merry pleasantry of the comedy. The honest citizens' wives in

Windsor are quite beside themselves at the impudent and shameless wooing of the bulky courtier; they are incensed at the bad opinion which he has of honourable matrons; they almost begin to doubt whether in their honesty they may not have made a mistake. Their mutual thought is to revenge themselves on him; they would teach him to know 'turtles from jays;' yet they have also a scruple as to playing any trick which comes too near their honour. Great emphasis is laid throughout on honest knavery, in contrast to Falstaff's knavery. A wife, say the two women, may be merry and yet honest too; even at the end of the seventeenth century there was a song which Halliwell quotes, in which, alluding to the moral of this play, the verse 'wives may be merry and yet honest too,' returns as a refrain. That the tricks played upon Falstaff were not only 'admirable pleasures' but '*honest* knaveries' can alone move the plain, true, timid, and pious pastor to take pleasure in them. This simple but honest knavery celebrates its victory throughout over cunning and presumption. The crafty self-loving dig the pit and fall into it themselves; it is dug too strangely wide even for the simple, because self-conceited cunning estimates too lightly its opponent honesty. These words may be regarded as the soul of the play. It is a reflection to be drawn from no other of Shakespeare's dramas, but only from this play of intrigue. All the underplot of the piece relates to this point and to this lesson. The cunning host—a boaster full of mockery and tricks, who considers himself a great politician and Machiavellian—teases the wavering, fencing Dr. Caius and the pedantic Welshman Evans; the same vexation befalls him as Falstaff, that the simple men, who cannot even speak English, combine against him, and cheat the crafty man about his horses. The jealous Ford gives away money and name, and places the honour of his house at stake, only to learn more certainly the supposed treachery of his wife; the eavesdropper hears not of his innocent better half, but of his own shame,[1] and suffers torments himself in return for those which he would have prepared for the envied unsuspecting Page and his innocent wife. In Page's house again other tricks are devised. Husband and wife conspire against each other and against the happiness of their innocent

[1] The sources for the farce between Falstaff and Brook are to be found in Giovanni Fiorentino's 'Art of Loving,' and in Straparola's 'Ring.'

daughter, to whom the one wishes to give an awkward simpleton for a husband, and the other an odd fellow; mutually they fall into the snares laid for them, and Fenton brings home the bride who has committed a 'holy offence,' since marriages are settled in Heaven, and wives are not, like land, to be purchased by money. Alike in all these corresponding affairs does business seek to ensnare honesty—cunning, simplicity—jealousy, innocence—and avarice, the inoffensive nature; and their evil design reverts upon themselves. Unclouded honest sense is always superior to base passion. And this moral, which links together these four intrigues, will be found, if we consider the piece from an ethical point of view (for the sake of its principal character and its development), to have a special reference to Falstaff's position and character. The selfishness which we exhibited as the soul of Falstaff's nature appears at its highest climax when, opposed to the virtue and simplicity which are its usual prey, in its vain security it considers the more subtle means of ensnaring as no longer necessary, and is thus ensnared in a gross trap. An egotist like Falstaff can suffer no severer defeat than from the honesty in which he does not believe, and from the ignorance which he does not esteem. The more ridiculous side of self-love is, therefore, in this play subjected to a ridiculous tragic-comic fall, which, as regards time and the development of the plot, precedes the serious comic-tragic fall which meets Falstaff on the accession of the king, when the serious and mischievous side of his self-love was just on the point of a dangerous triumph.

AS YOU LIKE IT.

THE pastoral comedy, As You Like It, has always extraordinarily pleased all German interpreters; it is only a pity that their interpretations have not had a similar fate. Tieck, who called it Shakespeare's most playful comedy, maintained that the poet had in this play trifled most capriciously with time and place; that in the catastrophe and combination of the whole he had ridiculed and frivolously avoided rules which he had usually observed; and that he had even sacrificed, as if in parody of himself, all truth of motive and the fundamental basis of composition, in order that he might write a truly free and merry comedy. According to this view, it would seem that Tieck considered the qualification of a 'true' comedy to lie in playfulness, in irregularity, and in capriciousness as to composition and ground of action. Ulrici took up the same idea, and carried it out with respect to the impulses both of characters and actions! In the whole play, he says, each acts or not as he pleases; every character, according to its humour, indulges its inclinations to good and evil, as the idea suggests itself. The incidents are not so much outward and objective as inward and subjective, the humour and caprice of persons in their influence one upon another is the basis of the whole action, and the cause, at the same time, of the fantastical character of the piece. But, in truth, this capriciousness and neglect of rules on the part of the poet or his characters is not to be found in the play at all. From the characters of Frederick, Oliver, and the rest, the dethronement of the banished Duke cannot be called whimsically capricious, as is here maintained; nor can the pursuit of Orlando be considered groundless, nor his design to wrestle with Charles accidental; nor can the intricacies and solution of the whole plot be regarded as fantastical. What further rules have been frivolously avoided or disregarded by the poet is a question that

has been already asked with wonder and surprise by Delius, without the possibility of a reply. And that time and place are here more capriciously shifted than in other plays, in which Shakespeare allowed access to the marvellous, is so little the case, that, on the contrary, among all dramas of this kind, this play evidently makes the most timid use of the fanciful.

The probable cause of these views and observations with regard to the comedy under consideration is limited to the following circumstances. We may consider this piece as probably intended for a masque, a style of drama in which the poet, whether by the introduction of wonderful machinery or by the display of all kinds of pageantry, permitted himself somewhat more license than elsewhere, but in no wise a license which interfered with the truth of his grounds for action or the just unravelling of his plot. Thus we are here transported to a romantic Arcadia, into which the forest of Arden is metamorphosed. Shakespeare met with this in the tale which furnished him with the material for his play; lions were brought from thence to France, and our poet added serpents and palm-trees. If with respect to the locality a slightly fanciful feature is thus introduced, this is also the case with respect to the characters of the play in Rosalind's pretence (and this Shakespeare likewise found in the source from which he drew) of having learned witchcraft from an uncle. But this feature, also, borders so closely on the limits of ordinary reality that it might be completely effaced by clever management in the performance. There is nothing to prevent the play from being thus understood; that Orlando, at the suggestion of Oliver, recognised the beautiful Ganymede after his swoon, and only let him carry on his play that he might not mar his mirth; the subtleness of the play will be extraordinarily increased if this is really exhibited in the performance. In this manner, the comedy only borders on the limits of the fantastical. And the justification of this lies in the style itself, whether it be that the poet composed the work as a masque, or as a pastoral drama, or as a play uniting the two styles. Shakespeare borrowed the whole plan of the piece from a pastoral romance by Thomas Lodge, 'Rosalynde; Euphues Golden Legacy,' 1590, and later evidently wished to form from it a pastoral [illegible] species of poem the fanciful and ideal lay rather in the general colouring than in single lines. The opera[illegible] peculiar to plays of this

kind; many songs are therefore introduced, which in the performance very essentially contribute to produce the frame of mind in which this comedy should be received. A play like that which Rosalind makes Hymen perform belongs to the characteristic style either of the pastoral or the masque. The truly pastoral scene between Silvius and Phœbe is called a pageant. Rightly performed, it would stand out in the general description of rural and forest life in our drama as a play within the play, composed in a still more idealistic style than the real pastoral piece; acted by the best players, in all unadorned simplicity of representation, it ought to be invested with such an odour of refinement as to show these children of nature withdrawn from the rude and agitated world and raised above it. All these peculiarities belonging to this species of poem place this play certainly somewhat out of the sphere of ordinary dramas; but we shall find the composition in its own way so profound that here again we shall perceive a confirmation of the fact that Shakespeare involuntarily improved and elevated every new material and style which he touched with his hand. It is true that in other more realistic plays of Shakespeare it does not occur that scenes, as here is twice the case (Act IV. sc. 2, and Act V. sc. 3), are inserted merely as stop-gaps without affecting the action; but this is characteristic of idle rural life, where nothing of more importance happens than a slaughtered deer and a song about it. It is true that here, more than in Shakespeare's other plays, there are small subordinate parts which signify little or nothing; but even in this respect more license is necessarily allowed to comedy than to tragedy. It is true that the characters are only here and there sketched in general outline, and even in those more worked out this is done rather by words than action. But this also is justified by the kind of poem. The subject for representation settled the characters, whose general social position and qualities were here more in question than their moral characteristics; and even in the principal figures, as in Love's Labour's Lost, the mental character and intellectuality required almost more to be displayed than the power of the will and the motive ortant actions. For this reason the actor will have e in finding out these characters; but this done, he lighted and surprised at their inner congruity any other of our poet's themes. He will the akespeare has not acted

here otherwise than elsewhere; that he has in no wise parodied himself; that it may rather be considered a parody of all criticism, when our Romanticists, as in this case, endeavour to prove to us the poet's virtues by his faults.

Shakespeare met with the design of the story of this comedy in Lodge's pastoral romance; he only added the characters of the clown and of the melancholy Jaques, of William and Audrey; the other persons, under other names, carry on the action as in Shakespeare. The style of the romance is prolix, affected, and bombastic, like all works of the kind; an exaggerated loquaciousness is the most striking characteristic of the extravagant mannerism of the narrator, as it is of all conceited writers; Adam in the forest on the point of starvation, and Orlando seeing the lion watching for its prey, hold long conversations. Many of the Ovid-like reminiscences, and much of the mythological learning with which the romance abounds, still adhere to Shakespeare's play; but, on the whole, he has completely eradicated the pastoral mannerism, and, according to his wont, he simplifies the motives of the actions and ennobles the actions themselves. The rude enmity between Oliver and Orlando, which results in acts of violence in the romance, is properly moderated by our poet. He has removed the unnaturalness of Celia's banishment by her father on her protest against the banishment of Rosalind. The war, by which the exiled prince regains his throne, and the rescue of the ladies from robbers, with which in the romance Celia's love for Oliver is introduced, have been omitted by the dramatist in order that he might not disturb the peace and merry sports of his rural life by any discords. The play between Orlando and Rosalind is in the romance only a pastoral song, but Shakespeare has made it a link for the continuation of the action in the last act. In all the rest the poet adheres faithfully to the course of the story in the novel, without much addition and omission. He even kept closely before him the moral of the narrative, which in the romance is declared by perpetual repetitions, and is well adapted to the nature and position of the characters. The 'sweetest salve for misery,' this is the drift of the 'golden legacy' of the tale, 'is patienc[illegible] and the only medicine for want that pretious implaist[illegible] content.' We must brave misfortune with equanimi[illegible] meet our destiny with resignation. Thus the two l[illegible] Orlando laugh at Fortune and disregard her powe[illegible]

three, or, counting Oliver, the four principal figures have one point in common in their lot, namely, that love is added as a new evil (it is thus viewed) to their outward misfortunes, to banishment and poverty. This also they strive to meet with the same weapon, with control and moderation, not too much evading it, nor too much desiring it, paying more regard to virtue and nature than to riches and rank, as Rosalind when she chooses the posthumous Orlando, and Oliver the shepherdess Celia. The loving pastoral couple form a contrast in this respect, that Sylvius loves too ardently, whilst Phœbe despises love too coldly. If we concentrate this moral reflection into one idea, we shall find that the intention of the narrative is to extol self-mastery, equanimity, and self-command in outward suffering and inward passion. We should scarcely imagine, at the first glance, that this idea lies also at the root of Shakespeare's comedy, so completely is every reflection avoided, and so entirely in the lightest and freest play of action and conversation is a mere picture sketched for our contemplation.

The author of the romance of Rosalind contrasts town and court life with rural and pastoral life, the one as a natural source of evil and misery, which finds its natural remedy in the other. 'The greatest seas,' he says, 'have the sorest storms, small currents are ever calm. Cares wait upon a crown. Joyfulness dwells in cottages. The highest birth has more honour, but is subject to the most bale. Griefs are incident to dignity, and sorrows haunt royal palaces.' On the contrary, contentment lives in the country, and we 'drink there without suspicion and sleep without care, unstirred by envy. Desires mount not there above our degrees, nor our thoughts above our fortunes.' In the same manner Shakespeare makes his Corydon sensible of the dignity of his pastoral condition, in which he lives upon his honest gains, envying no man's happiness, glad of other men's good, and content with his toil. In the same manner he appears to let the sorrows which arise at the court in the first and second acts find their cure in the pastoral life of the last three acts. In the same manner he im-[illegible]tes the cause of the disasters created there to the vices which [illegible]g to courts and to worldly life, to the envy and hatred [illegible] from covetousness and ambition, and in the same man-[illegible]eks the remedy for the wounds inflicted there in that [illegible] and simple contentment to which a life of solitude

invites or even compels. The first acts begin therefore like a tragedy; they exhibit the actors in a state of war, from which they subsequently escape or are driven away to the merry sports of pleasure and peace which await them in the forest of Arden, with its hunting-life, and in the shepherds' cottages on its border. Duke Frederick is called even by his daughter a man of harsh and envious mind; he appears to be perpetually actuated by gloomy fancies, by suspicion and mistrust, and to be urged on by covetousness. He has banished his brother and usurped the throne, he has robbed all the lords of their property who have gone with his brother, he has regarded with hostile suspicion all honourable men, the old Rowland de Bois as well as his brave Orlando, and he has surrounded himself with the dishonourable, who nevertheless, like Le Beau, are not devoted to him. Orlando's victory over the wrestler is enough to kindle his suspicion against him; once awakened it lights upon the hitherto spared Rosalind, for no other reason than that she throws his daughter into the shade, and thus excites the father's envy, a passion which he wishes the inoffensive Celia to share also. When both the friends upon this disappear at the same time with Orlando, Frederick's suspicion and covetousness fall upon Oliver, whom he had hitherto favoured. In this eldest son of the brave Rowland de Bois there flows the same vein of avarice and envy as in the Duke. He strives to plunder his brother of his poor inheritance, he undermines his education and gentility, he first endeavours to stifle his mind, and then he lays snares for his life; all this he does from an undefined hatred of the youth, whom he is obliged to confess is 'full of noble device,' but who for this very reason draws away the love of all his people from Oliver to himself; and on this account excites his envious jealousy. Both the Duke and Oliver equally forfeit the happiness which they seek, the one the heritage of his usurped dukedom, the other his lawful and unlawful possessions. And in this lies the primary impulse and the material motive for their subsequent renunciation of the world; a more moral incentive to this change of mind is given to Oliver in the preservation of his life by Orlando, and to the Duke in the warning voice of a religious man who speaks to his conscience and his fear. These are only sketches of characters, not intended to play conspicuous parts; but we see that they are drawn by the same sure hand which we have seen at work throughout Shakespeare's works.

The misery which proceeds from these two covetous and ambitious men, who were not even contented in and with their prosperity, affects in the first place the deposed Duke. He took flight with 'a many merry men' to the forest of Arden, where they live 'like the old Robin Hood of England, and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world.' They spend their days in hunting, singing, and meditation. Their songs call their thoughts from ambition to nature and simple life, where no ingratitude of man, no forgotten kindness and friendship torments; but at the most the rough air and storms of winter, which they praise in smiling consideration that they are no flatterers, but 'counsellors that feelingly persuade them what they are.' Thus withdrawn from the dangers of the 'envious court,' they have learned to love exile beyond the painted pomp of the palace; endowed with patience and contentment, they have translated 'the stubbornness of fortune into so quiet and so sweet a style,' and sweet appear to them

> the uses of adversity,
> Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
> Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.

In this life, they find

> Tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
> Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

The fragrance of the country, the scent of the wood, the tone of solitude in this part of the piece, have been always justly admired; colouring and scenery gently and tenderly attune the imagination of the reader, they make us understand how hermits in such a region feel impelled to fill up the leisure and void with meditation and reflection, and to open the heart to every soft emotion; the noise of the world falls only from afar on the ear of the happy escaped ones, and the poet has carefully avoided in any way inharmoniously to disturb this profound peace. When the starved Orlando introduces the only discord, by frightening the Duke and his companions at their meal, how wonderfully is this discord resolved at once by the loving gentleness with which they meet and help the needy one!

Only the one danger does this life possess, that by its monotony it awakes, in one and another, ennui, melancholy, and ill-humour. In the hunting circle round the Duke, Jaques is in this condition. He shares with the Duke and

his companions the propensity for drawing wisdom and philosophy from the smallest observation and consideration; he has to excess the gift of linking reflections to the smallest event, and in this seclusion from the world these reflections have assumed a touch of despondency. The melancholy which this man imbibes from every occasion has always appeared to most readers, and especially to most actors, as mild, human, and attractive, and they represent it as such; but it is rooted, on the contrary, in a bitterness and ill-humour which render the witty and sententious worldling far rather a rude fault-finder than a contented sufferer like the rest. He is of that class of men to whom Bacon addresses this sentence:—'He who is prudent may seek to have desire; for he who does not strive after something with eagerness, finds everything burdensome and tedious.' In his hypochondriacal mood and in his spirit of contradiction—the remembrance of his travels and his former worldly life having left a sting behind—Jaques finds this forest life equally foolish as that of the court which they have quitted; he carries the state of nature and peace so far; he considers the chase of the animals of the forest a greater usurpation than that [illegible] unlawful Duke; he flees from the solitary company into still greater solitude, [illegible] to hide his thoughts, the fruit of his former experience, in his present leisure; then again with eagerness he seeks the quest of society and cheerful company. Wholly 'out of tune and jars,' he is blunted to all friendly habits, he is disgusted with all, and even with the efforts of others to satisfy him; he rails at his own birth and at his fortune, he rails against [illegible] born of Egypt;' he blames the whole world, finds [illegible] censure in the great system of the world, and stumbles at every grain of dust in his path. Long experienced [illegible] has learned to find out the shadow side of every age [illegible] he has satiated himself with the world, and has not entered this life of retirement furnished with the patience and contentment of the others, but from a natural passion for the contrary. If his satire is directed more against things in general, and is free from bitterness towards stated individuals, this is only a result of his inactive nature, which is rather calculated for observation and reflection than for work and action, and of his isolated position in this idyllic and peaceful life, in which moreover the poet will suffer no discord to arise. This character is entirely Shakespeare's property and addition. It furnishes a

fresh instance to us of the two-sidedness of the poet's mind, with which so many proofs have made us familiar. Shakespeare does not imitate the trivial tradition of the pastoral poets, who praise the quiet life of nature in itself as a school for wisdom and contentment. He shows, in the contrast between Jaques and the Duke, that those who would desire enjoyment and advantage from this life must in themselves have a natural disposition for moderation and self-mastery; they must be able to disarm misfortune and to do without happiness. But this Jaques, according to the Duke, has been himself a libertine, leading a sensual and dissolute life, and he has now leaped from one extreme to another—a blasé man, an exhausted epicurean, an outcast from life. The sensible Orlando with true instinct perceives his censoriousness, regarding him as a fool or a cipher; Rosalind discovers it, and in the poet's own meaning with regard to those who are in extremity of either joy or sorrow, he calls the fools who are ever laughing, and those who y melancholy to excess, 'abominable fellows who betray elves to every modern censure, worse than drunkards.' arrying to excess his gloomy love of calumny, Jaques in the opposite when he wishes to be invested l's motley, to have 'as large a charter as the wind, to om he pleases,' and to cleanse 'the foul body of the d.' Completely mistaking the inoffensive vocation e wishes to 'disgorge' into the general world the caught from his evil experience. As no oppor- is offered, he turns at last, retaining his former ermit Frederick, because, 'out of these convertites h matter to be heard and learned.'

ve seen how the banished Duke has converted his o smiling happiness. He is joined subsequently by ladies, Rosalind and Celia, and by Orlando. In them oet has shown us what qualities caused them to spend the e in the 'golden world' of Arden more pleasurably than the melancholy Jaques. A more than sisterly bond inseparably chains the two cousins; in the romance they are compared with Orestes and Pylades; and in their fervent friendship alone we see the gift of self-renunciation, which renders them strangers to all egotism. Innocent and just, Celia solemnly promises at a future time to restore to Rosalind her withdrawn inheritance; she demands of her in return to be as merry as she is herself; she would, she says to her, had their

positions been different, have been happier; and she proves this subsequently, when, a better friend than daughter, she follows the banished cousin into exile. Rosalind for a long time disarms her uncle's envy and suspicion by her innocent nature, which even in thought wishes no evil to an enemy; he was overcome by the universal impression of her character, which won for her the praise and pity of the people. She bore her sorrow in 'smoothness, silence, and patience;' her friendship for Celia lightened it; out of love to her she constrained herself to be more cheerful than became her position. We recognise plainly the nature with which Lodge also invested Rosalind—the disposition to command herself and to deprive misfortune of its sting. But for this we must not consider her cold and heartless. She feels deeply that fortune has punished her with disfavour; and when in the person of Orlando she meets one equally struck by fate, her heart, taken unawares, betrays how accessible she is to the most lively feelings. The similarly hapless circumstances which Orlando announces to her, his combat with the wrestler, his descent from an old friend of her father's, all this, added to his attractive manner, helps to conquer *her*, who has already vanquished *him*. 'Her pride fell with her fortunes;' she gives the victor a chain which seals at once her fate and her almost hereditary love; she rashly and involuntarily reveals her feelings, having only moments in which to see him; she turns back to him, and once again she even says to him that he has 'overthrown more than his enemies;' and immediately afterwards we find her fallen 'fathom-deep in love.' We see indeed that a violent passion has to be mastered; *how* she masters it is afterwards the problem which she has to solve in her subsequent meeting with Orlando. In this Orlando, on the other side, we perceive just as readily the same naturally excitable temperament, and, at the same time, the power of self-command which knows how to restrain it. He has been 'trained like a peasant' by his brother, and treated like a slave; he feels the disadvantage of his deficient education more than the crushed nobility of his birth; the 'spirit of his father grows strong in him;' he will no longer endure the unworthy treatment; and when Oliver insults in him the honour of his father, he attacks his elder brother, not so far, however, as, according to the romance, to forget himself in acts of violence or to lay snares for revenge, but even in anger he is master of himself. The feeling of his

nothingness struggles in his mind with an ambitious striving. He seeks the combat with the feared wrestler Charles, contented to meet death, since he has no honour to lose and no friends to wrong, but still hoping to recommend himself by victory, and to secure himself from his brother. Instead of this, he provokes the Duke to suspicion and excites Oliver to designs against his life; and although he has just tested his own strength, he prefers to wander away rather than to meet the malice of his brother. So in the wood afterwards, with the anxiety of childlike fidelity and the strength of an irritated wild beast, he is quickly resolved to maintain with sword and violence the life of his fainting old servant, but he is gentle as a lamb again when he meets with friendly courteousness. Subsequently, when he sees his brother sleeping in the arms of danger, he is not untempted to revenge, but fraternal love prevails. Throughout we see the healthful, self-contained, calm nature of a youth, which promises a perfect man. Everything in him bespeaks a child of nature, who has remained pure and uninjured in the midst of a corrupt world. What a shaming contrast to the calumniator Jaques, whom he thus answers, when he invites him to rail with him against the deceitful world: 'I will chide no breather in the world but myself, against whom I know most faults!' How innocent does the young Hercules appear in his laconic bashfulness, when love has 'overthrown' him, when Rosalind makes him her valuable gift and her still more valuable confession, and he finds no words to thank her for the one and to reply to the other!

In all these characteristics, in all three individuals, we cannot overlook the predisposition to a natural power of resistance against the overwhelming force of outward evil and of inward emotion. Endowed with this gift, they bear about with them a spring of happiness, as is proved by the ladies in their merry league in the very scene of hatred and persecution. This spring, however, will of course flow more richly as soon as it is set free from hindrances, and freed from the intricate and manifold passions of a rude and intriguing society; when it is, as it were, left to itself and thrown on its own affections and feelings. Hardly, therefore, is Rosalind's forced and uneasy connection with her uncle broken up, than she feels herself freer in the unhappiness of exile than in the happiness of a court life; the true friendship of Celia calls forth her innate good humour, which had hitherto been fettered: the prospect

of seeing her father again makes her enterprising and bold; she conquers her womanly fear, and takes upon herself to play the part of a man, and that a martial one. The fair Ganymede in his hunter's dress exhibits forthwith a certain power of self-command when compared to the enervated Celia; the weariness of the journey and the meeting with Silvius, whose tears open his love-wounds afresh, cannot destroy his good humour. Rosalind endures her love silently; not so the wandering Orlando, who tells his to the deaf woods, while he carves the name of Rosalind on the barks, and hangs odes to her praise, the essays of an untutored talent, upon the trees. Celia discovers the poet; amid the convulsions of their fate, the two, so suddenly united and separated, meet again strangely and unexpectedly; when Rosalind surmises it by the hints of Celia, we see again the intensely agitated being, who appears unable to conceal her feelings. How her blood rises to her cheeks! What haste is there in her questions! With what sweet impatience does her anticipation burst forth! One inch of delay seems to her more than 'a South-Sea of discovery!' When she now hears of his presence, and ventures to hope to retain him and to possess him, pursued by no envious eye, entirely and undisturbed in this pastoral solitude and retirement, where, in the words of the romance, 'opportunity, the sweetest friend of Venus, dwells in cottages,' we see her who was before at the court so 'gentle, silent, and patient,' suddenly seized with a wanton love of teasing, with the most excited joy, and with breathless talkativeness; her happiness overflows like a spring tide, from which we are inclined to fear everything. 'But in love as she was,' says the novel, 'she shrouded her pains in the cinders of honourable modesty.' Woman is 'apter to love,' says Rosalind in Shakespeare, 'than to confess she does.' At the time when, under the impulse of the moment, she discovered herself to Orlando, she gave the lie to this her own rule, and all that she now does in the delight of perfect idleness is as if she would make amends for her fault. The characters are changed; once he was bashful and flattering, and she was candid; now she is reserved with her love, while he is confessing it to the winds and to men, and to all who will listen to it. Once she had betrayed her feelings to him, now she delights on their first meeting in drawing *his* confession from him, and she goes through all the variations of it with secret delight, and with feigned jest and derision. It

not difficult to bring one so proud of his love to an avowal that he is the poetical panegyrist of Rosalind; then she discovers that he does not look like a lover, that he has nothing of the 'careless desolation' of the lover about him: she would fain hear his protest. She tries to set him against his love that she may test its constancy; it is a tonic to her, when with calm certainty he says that 'he would not be cured' of his love. With her ingenious acuteness, she contrives to place herself in a position to be herself and yet not to appear so, to enjoy the presence and affection of her lover and yet not to surrender herself immodestly to one untested—to love, as she said, yet not to confess, and thus to fulfil the desires of her impatient patience and of her eloquent silence. Whilst Shakespeare, following the romance, thus prepares the way, so that Rosalind, without violating her morality, can give free scope to her love, he has avoided all the express moralising of the romance, both here and in Oliver's connection with Celia. Celia also exhorts herself to love with patience, not to be too timid nor too bold; she only yields when Oliver speaks of marriage; modesty is here also the guide of action. Shakespeare has treated this connection of Celia's very briefly. From an expression while at the court, we may conclude that she regards love affairs altogether more coldly and more practically than Rosalind; her rapid engagement to Oliver is therefore not without its design; but that Shakespeare also regarded the speedy marriage as a preventive against unchastity may be gathered from a single word. It would have weakened the power of the comedy had the poet entered in any way further into the meaning of the moral lectures of the romance. Moreover, he has so maintained Rosalind's character that the truth of the delineation itself exempted him from this prosaic interruption. In herself she is little qualified for reflection; not from minute deliberation, but from a natural instinct which adroitly seizes an offered opportunity, she hits upon the expedient for curbing her passion by forcing it into a play of fancy, and for mastering heart and feeling by giving employment to mind and imagination. In this way she preserves her morality and wards off melancholy and sadness from herself and her lover; and thus the poet, in a manner very different to that of Lodge in his romance, obtains the unusual æsthetic advantage of introducing this spring of wit into the barrenness of retired life, allowing it to gush forth in its unhindered course, in free nature, far from

all conventionality. Formerly, in her paternal home, the dark Celia was the more merry of the two friends; but now her more quiet reserve constitutes a foil to the playfulness of Rosalind, which, in her unexpected prosperity, knows no bounds.

Orlando enters into Rosalind's sport rather passively than actively. In their similar circumstances in the town, he was the active one, as the man ought to be, and she the enduring one; in this little love intrigue the woman is rightly the instigator and leader. He allows himself, neither willingly nor unwillingly, to be drawn into the strange plan of wooing Ganymede as his Rosalind. He discovered the resemblance between the two, he regards her at first as the brother of his beloved one, he is at ease and pleased when near her, he has an object for his sighs, and what lover lamented and did not gladly evidence his love! But with all this he is not so ardent in his service, because his healthful nature does not possess the melancholic and sentimental vein of amorousness. When he keeps not his time, Rosalind thinks that it might well be said of him that 'Cupid had clapped him o' the shoulder,' but had left him heart-whole. In this tone she torments the poor man who of course cannot satisfy her, and this inflicted pain is only made amends for by that which she herself suffers as soon as she is alone. Then we see by her impatient humour, by her upbraidings, by her tears, and by her fear of losing him again, that her teasing frolicsomeness really required self-mastery, that she in fact needed self-command to sustain her part, and that tenderness and feeling went ever hand in hand with her playfulness. This we might readily forget in those passages in which she tortures him with assumed cruelty, in which she almost heartlessly endeavours to make him fearful and anxious respecting his marriage and his mistress, and in which she seems to exhibit the characteristics of a cold ironical nature. In the passage also in which she depicts to him a woman's wit (Act IV. sc. 1), which is never to be checked, and never to be put out of countenance, one might argue indeed sadly for poor Orlando. But her nature throughout is marked by a rare combination of the just balance of the powers of feeling and intelligence; the sensibility of Viola and the wit of Beatrice are blended in her; the poet has invested her with a remarkably free tongue, in order that we may not be misled into the error of believing that there was even a trace of conventional reserve or asceticism in her discretion. Phœbe designates exactly this two-sidedness

of her nature, when she says that her soft eye is at variance with her sharp words, and heals the wounds which her tongue makes. In the midst of her merriment therefore, when Orlando goes away, how suddenly the softness of heart breaks forth in the words: 'Alas, dear love, I cannot lack thee two hours!' How she makes every effort to have him back quickly! How she sighs away the short time of separation! And then when, instead of him, Oliver comes and tells the story of Orlando's hurt, she faints away; the complete woman comes to light in the disguised man, and her perfect love breaks forth from its covering. The riddle is now solved. Oliver sees through her: 'You a man?' he says; 'you lack a man's heart." Then she betrays herself further, by expecting him to believe that her swoon was counterfeited. He believes her not. The conviction strikes him; he leaves her, jestingly calling her Rosalind. We must assume that Oliver imparted his discovery to Orlando. Now it is Orlando's turn to carry on the sport that he may not spoil her pleasure, and this is no small trial of *his* patience. She asks him if his brother told him that she had counterfeited a swoon. He answers ambiguously, 'Ay, and greater wonders than that.' It is as if she feared his discovery, when she refers this reply at once to Celia's betrothal. Every following word of Orlando's increases in delicacy, if the part is thus understood, and we feel that he knows from this time forth with whom he has to do. And this also renders it explicable that the disclosure at last scarcely excites any surprise.

The contrast afforded by the pastoral episode between Phœbe and Silvius will now become clear; or should it not, we must gather the explanation of it likewise from Lodge's romance, where it is perspicuous even to insipidity. In contrast to the active excitement of the court and town, peace and quiet rule in this pastoral life; while in the one envy and hatred carry on their intrigues, in the other love at most plays its innocent tricks. Love is, according to the romance, as 'precious in a shepherd's eye as in the lookes of a king;' the opportunity for love and its fidelity belongs especially to this class, because solitude increases the disposition to sociability. Thus we find Silvius possessed of a violent and importunate love, full of all those thousand follies with which lovers magnify the smallest thing that affects their passion into the most sacred and important matter. The tale, always true to its one moral, upbraids him with the immoderateness of his love, because he knows not

how to conceal it with patience. We here see plainly the contrast to the love of Rosalind, although in Shakespeare she says that her passion was much upon the fashion of Silvius.' But this is indeed as little the case as Rosalind resembles the fashion of Phœbe, though in the same tone and manner she shows herself averse to all hyperbolical protestations of love. But this in her is the result of a healthful nature, which dislikes every exaggeration; in Phœbe, whom the poet depicts as a regular beauty (black-haired, with bugle eye-balls and cheeks of cream), it arises from coyness, hatred of love, and the presumptuous pride of wishing to conquer it. The wise medium between timidity and craving for love, which is sought after by the two friends, is missed by Phœbe and Silvius in an opposite manner. That Rosalind has a certain share of the fashion of both of them places her upon a middle ground, upon which she shows herself at once capable and ready to humble the pride of Phœbe with greater pride, and on the other hand to strengthen the humility of the poor worm Silvius. Between them both, the town lady and her Orlando appear as the really ingenuous children of true nature, contrasted with the overstrained creations of a conventional fiction.

Another contrast is formed by the relation of the clown to Audrey, which is wholly Shakespeare's addition. Touchstone, in his verses to the rough country girl, in intercourse with whom he imagines himself like Ovid among the Goths, parodies the languishing poetry of Orlando; in his false marriage by Sir Oliver he parodies that of Rosalind and Orlando by Celia; and in his submissive humour in marrying the ugly Audrey he parodies the unequal unions of the rest. His marriage, however, is only pretended; he does not contract it, like Celia, to avoid immorality, but to indulge in it. He does the contrary to Rosalind and Orlando; he misuses this natural life of retirement, in the intention of again casting off Audrey at a convenient season. He uses the opportunity which here presents itself, without possessing the fidelity which according to Lodge's romance should belong to the place. He seems equally devoid of the morality of either town or country. His language reminds us of the time when he belonged to this rural life and its habits, but he would now fain act the courtier. As Jaques went with the Duke into retirement, so he followed Celia from attachment to her, but not from personal inclination; he behaves like a courtier when he speaks of his condescending affection,

when he repulses the poor William, when he displays his knowledge of the catechism of honour to the courtly bully, when he depreciates the shepherd's life to Corin, and in jesting exaggeration perceives the same sin in the propagation of sheep as Jaques seriously does in the chase. And in the same manner he displays his loose courtly morals with respect to the honourable Audrey.

In Touchstone, Shakespeare has for the first time produced a fool of a somewhat more elevated nature. In all the earlier comedies there have been only clowns introduced, natural fools whose wit is either studied and mechanically prepared or is given out in droll unconsciousness. The fool alone in All's Well that Ends Well has somewhat of the 'prophetic' vein in him, which he ascribes to himself according to the general notion of the age that fools, in virtue of their capacity for speaking 'the truth the next way,' possessed something of a divine and foretelling character. Shakespeare, at any rate in his artistic efforts, rendered complete homage to this notion of the age respecting the higher significance of fools. He left to the Ben Jonsons and the Malvolios that over-wisdom, which from learned haughtiness and pedantry, or from self-love or corrupt taste, looks down contemptuously or censuringly on these characters of comedy. As we have now often seen, he invested even the simple clowns with a deeper significance, from the relation in which he always placed them to the action of the piece, without fearing to place constraint on nature and truth; for who has not often witnessed, in living examples, how mother-wit solves unconsciously and easily problems over which the wise labour, and how a childlike mind executes in simplicity that which no understanding of the intelligent perceives? But a higher value than this is attributed by Shakespeare to the men of wit, to the real fools who play their part with knowledge, to whom full power is given to speak the truth, to rend asunder, as often as they will, the veil of mere propriety and hypocrisy, and wittily to unmask the folly of others under cover of their own. This appeared to Shakespeare 'a practice as full of labour as a wise man's art,' and as useful as a chaplain's discourse. For it appeared to him to belong to the most expert knowledge of the world and of men, of the 'quality of persons and the time,' to use appropriately and wisely the sting of seeming folly; and he admired the watchful and acute mind, which was quick enough to discover the veiled weaknesses of men and

understood how like 'the haggard to check at every feather that comes before his eye.' But for men in general he considered the presence of a fool as a useful test of head and heart. To Parolles, Malvolio, and such-like knaves or angular pedants, the witticisms of fools are like inopportune 'cannon-bullets,' while to the generous and the guiltless, who have a free conscience, they pass for 'slight bird-bolts.' The wit of fools shoots vainly past these innocent ones; those who shrink at the whizzing of its arrows discover their folly, though perhaps the motley man did not even aim at them. When life was in harmony with this play of fancy, this privileged folly was a profession, a vocation. Just at Shakespeare's time it passed from life to the stage, and with this it began to disappear from society itself. This was perhaps a further challenge to Shakespeare to dignify it and to rescue it for his art. But from the coarseness of the actors, and the inclination of the people to laugh only at the clumsy, ludicrous jokes of the clown, this was very difficult. We have before mentioned what misuse of the privileges of the fool were made upon the stage by Tarlton and Kempe; as long as this continued, as long as the principal art of these actors and the principal pleasure of the public was to see them stretch out the chin, let their hands hang, and twirl their wooden swords, Shakespeare could hardly venture to bring a more refined character of this sort upon the stage. Kempe twice withdrew from the company at the Blackfriars theatre. Only when he and his like were removed could Shakespeare write that more refined programme in Hamlet for the actor of the fool, only then could he bring upon the stage the fools of As You Like It, Twelfth Night, and Lear. Touchstone, in our present piece, is not quite so expert nor so sensible of his wit as the fools in Twelfth Night and Lear; but he is also not on the same ground with Costard, Launce, and Launcelot. He stands on the doubtful limit between instinct and consciousness, where this character is the most acceptable. Jaques regards him as a clown, who has 'crammed' the strange places of his dry brain with observation, which 'he vents in mangled forms;' he considers him as one of those 'natural philosophers' (by whom Warburton ought to have understood nothing more than a natural fool) of whom Touchstone himself says that they have learned no wit by nature nor art. The two ladies call him by turns a natural and a fool; Celia, in his face, ascribes to him the dulness of the fool, which is the whetstone of the witty,

while to the true fool the folly of others is the whetstone of his wit. And Touchstone himself assumes the appearance of being wiser than he himself knew; he shall, he says, ne'er be 'ware of his own wit, till he breaks his shins against it. On the other hand, from his expressions in other passages, he regards himself as far superior to the clown and the natural philosopher, and the Duke readily perceives his design behind his interposing folly; 'he uses his folly,' he says, 'like a stalking-horse, and under the presentation of that he shoots his wit.'

Entirely corresponding with this two-sided capacity are his actions and language throughout the piece. He performs his tricks in the manner of the clowns, with whom roguish acts pass for wit. On the other hand, the poet has consigned to him the part of the comic chorus in the comedy, in which the fool should always be employed. We have shown above the contrast afforded by the connection between Touchstone and Audrey, compared with that of the other couples; the idealised pastoral love is parodied in it by one of a more real nature. These contrasts were peculiar to the pastoral drama. Thomas Heywood, in characterising the pastoral plays of Shakespeare's time, uses these words: 'If we present a pastoral, we show the harmless love of shepherds, diversely moralised, distinguishing between the craft of the city and the innocency of the sheep-cote.' We see, indeed, according to this definition, that Shakespeare's play is nothing else than a pastoral; the habits of town and country are brought into manifold contrast, yet the moral which the poet draws may be essentially diverse from that which, in the pastoral romances and dramas of the age, would be usually inferred from that distinction of town and country. Shakespeare has employed the mouth of his fool as his stalking-horse, to express his opinion of the customary idealising of shepherd life in pastoral poetry, in the same sense as it appears in his play and in the scenes it contains. On Corin's question, as to how he likes this shepherd's life, Touchstone answers him: 'Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself it is a good life; but in respect that it is a shepherd's life it is naught. In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life. Now, in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious. As it is a spare life, look you, it fits my humour well; but as there is no more plenty in it, it goes much against my stomach. Hast any philosophy in

thee, shepherd?' It seems to me that perhaps all pastoral poetry put together scarcely contains so much real wisdom as this philosophy of the fool. He finds nothing to say against the shepherd's life, but nothing also against the contrary manner of living; and the homely simplicity of Corin himself is on his side in this, that he leaves courtly manners to the court and country ones to the country. Shakespeare knew nothing of the one-sidedness which condemned or rejected either life in the world or life in retirement, the one for the sake of the other. Rather does the fool's wit consider him who merely knows the one, or, as the meaning is, merely esteems the one, as 'damned, like an ill-roasted egg, all on one side.' In Shakespeare's play, no expression of preference rests on either of the two kinds of life. In neither of the two circles does he find the condition of happiness or virtue in itself, but he sees happiness most surely dwelling, not in this or that place, but in the beings who have a capacity and a natural share of qualification for either or for every other kind of existence; in those beings who, exiled from the world, do not feel themselves miserable, just as little so as when they are recalled to the world from their solitude. The poet knows nothing of a certain situation, condition, or age, which would be a sure source of happiness; but he knows that there are men in all classes and generations, like his Duke, his Rosalind, and his old Adam Spencer, who bear in their bosoms that equanimity and contentment which is the only fruitful soil of all true inner happiness, and who carry with them wherever they go a smiling Eden and a golden age.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

THE serious part of Much Ado About Nothing, the relation between Hero and Claudio, is similar to the story of Ariodante and Ginevra in the fifth Canto of Ariosto's 'Orlando Furioso,' a subject which had been already handled in 1583, and was performed before Elizabeth under the title of 'Ariodante and Ginevra.' Ariosto's epos was translated in 1591 by John Harington, but the episode had been even earlier separated from it, and had been twice translated into English; Spenser also, in the second canto of his 'Faerie Queene,' had introduced it with some alteration. In Bandello's 22nd tale, 'Timbreo of Cardona,' the same subject is handled; and, arguing from the names employed for the acting characters, Shakespeare availed himself of this source for his play without going back to Ariosto. Now this tale did not afford the poet even a hint of any moral view of the story; it is a bald narrative, containing nothing which could assist in the understanding of the Shakespearian piece; in the play we have just considered he had to conceal the vast moralising of the source from which he drew his material; in this material, on the other hand, he had to strike the latent ethical spark within it. The errors between Claudio and Hero were transferred by Shakespeare from the shallow novel into life; he dived into the nature of the incident; he investigated the probable character of the beings among whom it was imaginable; he found the key-note by means of which he could bring the whole picture into harmony. The subject expanded in his hands; the main action received an explanatory prelude; the principal characters (Hero and Claudio) obtained an important counterpart in the connection between Benedick and Beatrice, which is entirely Shakespeare's property; these characters gained an importance even beyond the principal ones; the plot, as is ever the case with our poet, and as Coleridge has especially pointed out in this play, gave

place to the characterisation; the question seems almost what manner of men made the *much ado* about nothing, rather than the *nothing* about which *ado* was made. The whole stress seems to lie, not in the plot, not in the outward interest of the catastrophe, but in the moral significance which the disturbance caused by the Bastard John exercises upon the two engagements which are concluded and prepared, and again dissolved and left unconfirmed, or rather upon the beings who have entered into these engagements. But whilst the poet in this manner studied the conditions of the subject represented, and the natural capacity and culture of the characters qualified to act in it, he has, it seems to us, lighted upon a soil which places this play in an express contrast to As You Like It, which was written at the same time. Considered as to outward form, the teasing war of wit between Benedick and Beatrice calls to mind the similar relation of Rosalind to Orlando; but in the development of the plot an opposite course of events at once meets the eye. While in the one a princely court and a great feudal house appear mutually at variance, we pass in the other into a similar circle in which the most delightful harmony reigns. While in the one the plan began in a tragic character with hostile persecution, and afterwards in the last three acts is developed into a comedy of an uninterruptedly cheerful nature, in the other, on the reverse, the merriest humour pervades the first three acts, and then the comedy threatens to change suddenly into a true tragedy. While in the one the characters in the foreground are persons who, schooled by misfortune, and endowed with self-command, equanimity, and self-possession, became master over their misfortune, in the other we are transported into a group of persons who, *used* to prosperity and *abused* by prosperity, have fallen, though endowed with the finest natural disposition, into the opposite faults—into want of stability, into self-loving inconstancy, into frivolity and credulity; in one word, into that giddiness which fickle fortune produces, and in which the man too dependent on the moment is not master of his judgment and resolves. And, finally, while in the one those strong and undismayed characters in the height of their misery find comfort and alleviation in the tender peace of a life of retirement, these effeminate beings are alarmed at the summit of their prosperity by a tragic incident, which arouses their indolent natures and imparts a salutary warning to them on their course of life.

Adhering to this view, we shall perceive that with all its poetic licence the comedy under consideration is connected in all its parts, and that a deep background is here given to a most insipid plot. We enter the house of the governor of Messina, which is raised by riches and great alliances, and we are struck with its untroubled domestic happiness, both as to circumstances and persons. A merry company smiles upon us in the first scene, on the reception of an unknown messenger; a friendly and honourable visit is announced which is even to increase its gaiety and conviviality. The most intimate familiarity exists among the members of the family, or rather of the house, both high and low. The servants listen to the guests, and give a report to their masters; the uncle Antonio at the masked ball accosts the waiting-maid, who reproaches him with his waggling head, and ridicules his wit; Hero's gentlewomen presume even with the foreign guests; they are accustomed to go to the utmost bounds in jesting with Leonato's daughter and niece. Even the watch of Messina stands on a similar intimate footing with the governor. Dogberry and Verges talk with him as with any other gossip; they are merciful and lazy in their station and calling, and let everything go on in the peaceful old way. In the family of the governor, Beatrice is the soul of mirth in the house, and, with a spirit always cheerful, she spreads around her joy and gladness. But the central point on which all hinges is the daughter of the house, the quiet Hero. She is her father's pride and ornament and love, compared to whom himself and everything else is thrown into the shade. With a heart tender and foreboding, she fascinates even when she is mute by the overpowering impression of her chaste, modest nature. She can practise no wanton playfulness, only at best behind the mask; she would fain not suffer the unseasonable jests of her waiting-woman; when she has played Beatrice her successful trick, she checks forbearingly every teasing word. When a scandalous suspicion is cast in the most degrading manner against this picture of innocence, shame struggles silently within her; her fiery eyes might have burned out the errors of her accusers, but she can find no words, and sinks mutely in a swoon. To the one who knows her, to Beatrice, she appears as she is, raised above all suspicion, although nothing speaks in her favour, and all witnesses and proofs testify against her. Such a being seems thoroughly qualified to form the happiness and

pride of a family which consists of good, honourable, and honoured men.

Into this circle the royal prince of Aragon comes on a visit. He had been here before with his suite; Claudio had already fixed his eyes on the beautiful Hero; Benedick had already sustained a skirmish of wit with Beatrice; and Borachio had already made acquaintance with Margaret. War had taken them away, and upon its successful termination they return to spend a month in easy recreation. These also are all children in the lap of fortune. The prince is thoroughly qualified to spoil others and to be spoilt himself, to dispense happiness and to enjoy it. He has a gloomy half-brother, who is a contrast in everything to all the beings whom we see around the prince; for this reason he cannot bear him; a former quarrel gave place to a reconciliation, but even now Don Pedro cares not for his brother, and strikingly gives the preference to his new favourite Claudio. He requires merry intercourse around him; a Benedick, whose humour never fails; still more a Claudio, who possesses not the sting of an evil tongue, which at times in Benedick speaks unpleasant truths; but rather he needs both together, their bantering intercourse opening to him a perpetual source of amusement. He assists the one in gaining for a wife the rich heiress Hero, and this happiness he enjoins him to seize quickly and without delay; he makes the other in love with Beatrice, and helps him to surmount the antagonistic spirit, which might have made him aimlessly delay this happiness. Of the two, Claudio is the more spoiled. An upstart, poor, and still very young, he has achieved unexpected deeds in the field; he has brought tears of joy to his old uncle in Messina by the importance he has gained; he has thus acquired the friendship of Benedick, and the favour of the prince, and the Bastard John ascribes to him all 'the glory of his overthrow.' In addition to this, he now obtains the gentle Hero, to whom he brings a nature as virginlike and pure as her own. He bears within him that which may fill him with a just self-reliance; good fortune increases it into a sensitive self-love, even into vanity of outward advantages. Benedick asserts of him that since he was in love he could lie for nights awake, carving the fashion of a new doublet; the old Antonio calls him in anger—which exaggerates, indeed, but does not invent—an ape and a fashion-monger; and Borachio, when he gives Conrade an account of Claudio's deception by means of the false

Hero, makes a far-fetched reflection upon his love of fashion, it almost seems in order that from this outward changeableness in Claudio he may infer changeableness of heart. At any rate, he expressly declines the idea that this reflection of his is undue rambling from his story.

Among these natures thus merry in their prosperity and luxury, the Bastard John appears as their single contrast. Fortune has never smiled upon him, nor he indeed upon fortune. He is by nature of a sour temper, melancholy and dejected, surrounded by servants of a similar character, reserved, laconic, and gloomy even at the friendly reception of his charming hosts. Incapable of concealing his feelings, he exhibits his resentment and sadness to everyone, and his outward reconciliation with his brother cannot hide his unreconciled heart; he would rather be disdained of all, than 'fashion a carriage to rob love from any.' He is sick with envy and vexation, especially with regard to Claudio; he is inclined to play him any bad trick, and ready to pay his confidential servant with heavy ducats for his help in such mischief. It dissatifies him that the feigned reconciliation affixes on him a kind of 'muzzle;' it seems a necessity of his nature on all occasions, as it is in his present peculiar position, to play the part of the destroyer of peace and joy; he takes pleasure in poisoning all the joy of his friends; he feeds upon the idea of working some mischief for them. He throws himself among them, in order that he may cross Claudio's marriage with Hero.

The trick by which, according to the tale, the jealous fortune-forsaken man suddenly disturbs the happy repose of the rest, is followed up by Shakespeare with a second, much more premised, which gives him more scope for developing his characters. Borachio has betrayed to his master that the prince would woo Hero for Claudio at the masked ball; the Bastard convinces himself that this takes place; he seems to find satisfaction in making himself believe that the prince is wooing for himself; he betrays the matter to Claudio whilst he assumes the appearance of thinking he is speaking with Benedick. Claudio's unstable, credulous, and changeable character, incapable of all calm reflection, is brought plainly to light on this small occasion. He knows, and everyone knows the malicious spirit of the Bastard who insinuates this suspicion of the prince; he knows from the prince himself that he was to play

his (Claudio's) part with Hero; yet John's mere word is enough to make him consider his prince as convicted of breach of friendship and fidelity, to make him leave Benedick irritated and angry, and give up his Hero at once: 'I wish him joy of her,' he says, bitterly indeed, yet lightly, and Benedick gives him for this the taunt he deserves: 'so they sell bullocks." The disaster proves to be a delusion; it is in all parts the prelude to the real action, and Shakespeare with his accustomed profoundness has made use of this less important example, and has taught us to know the beings who subsequently treat a more significant matter with the same credulity and carelessness, and who disregard even the previous warning. Through the failure of the first innocent trick, John is at once provoked to a second of a more dangerous character. The incredible calumniation of Hero is whispered by the Bastard to the prince and Claudio. The prince himself now shows that he is of the same fickle nature. Old and new experiences with this man (John) are forgotten. The first deception had impressed upon Claudio the principle that in the affairs of love all hearts must use their own tongues and trust no agent; but it affords him no lesson for this new emergency that on so heavy a charge laid against a being who seemed to him like Diana, he should use his own eyes, and trust no accuser, least of all an accuser such as this. But indeed his own eye was to be convinced by the accuser! Before, however, it comes to this proof, Claudio's proud self-love is so fearfully excited even at the bare idea, that he forms the heartless, vindictive resolve, in case of conviction, of exposing Hero's dishonour before the whole congregation in the church, at the marriage-altar, and the prince inconsiderately joins with him. We see clearly that this hasty resolve directly excludes true conviction; they ought to have caught Hero in the very act, but not watch in the distance in night and fog, and take shadows for proofs. It has been blamed as a fault of composition in Shakespeare that Claudio should have stood so near and have heard so distinctly, and yet have been implicated in such a mistake; but this is only a well-founded fault of character in Claudio. The poet has made even Borachio reproach Claudio that he had let his very eyes be deceived; he permits the simple watchmen to bring to light that which neither 'Pedro's nor Claudio's wisdoms could discover;' they, the careless sleepers, caught Borachio in *word*, when he only related his deceit to Conrade,

but the others catch him not in the accomplishment of the *deed*, though all their own and Hero's honour were at stake. The cruel design of the public separation is now executed; the unready, inexperienced Claudio resigns his Hero, with a bleeding heart, it is true, but he is blind to the proofs of her innocence in her former and present behaviour; his firm conviction of her guilt perplexes even her own father. Leonato, grown negligent like the others from prosperity, has received previous to the marriage a notification of the apprehension of the offenders, whose examination was wished for on that same morning; he left it to others. Now, when the fearful calamity overtakes him, it finds him devoid of self-command and utterly unfortified; he wishes Hero dead, he would gladly strike at her life without further inquiry, or even, like Friar Francis, noting the lady; he rejects with violence all consolation and patience. They agree to declare the calumniated Hero dead, that this may perhaps influence Claudio; but the passionate father destroys the effect of this himself, when he publishes Hero's death to the nobles with a challenge. And the old brother Antonio, he with the 'waggling head,' who had just been reproaching Leonato with his childish excitement, is seized in the same moment with the same unrestrained pride of family, and revolts against the disgraceful injury; a moment before he was acting the consoling philosopher, and suddenly like a raging boar he bursts forth, and would gladly risk even *his* frail life against the young and powerful offenders. Upon neither does the proclaimed death of Hero produce the effect which Friar Francis had wisely intended. He had calculated in this deception upon Claudio's changeableness. 'It so falls out,' he says,

> That what we have we prize not to the worth,
> Whiles we enjoy it; but being lack'd and lost,
> Why, then we rack the value.

But as certainly as the tidings were conveyed to him, Leonato added only a fresh adó about nothing; he brought Claudio's feelings into war with his self-love, and with the better part of this his sense of his honour and dignity. The intelligence thus lost its salutary sting. The old frivolity continues to play its part all the more undisturbed. Both friends would fain get rid of the troublesome scene with the old men as quickly as possible; they fall at once into a jesting

tone, which makes it difficult to Benedick to introduce his serious business; they encourage him by his wit to 'beat away' their melancholy, which is not deeply seated; his challenge surprises them not, but it only calls forth Claudio's bitterness and irritability, in which his frivolity and changeableness are exhibited afresh. Again, he asks not for explanation or reason, he perceives not Benedick's inward struggle, he angrily accepts the challenge. As he had renounced at once the prince, his patron, at the masked ball, and his beloved one at the midnight farce, he now does the same with his friend. Only when they hear of John's flight does the prince become perplexed and serious, and when the deception is cleared up, Hero returns with all her former loveliness before Claudio's soul; it is when the guilt falls on him alone that his sense of honour appears in the noblest point of view. As he avenged *his own* wounded honour relentlessly against the house of Leonato, he now avenges relentlessly on himself the family injury which he has inflicted, submitting readily to every condition and compensation.

The poet has with extraordinary skill so arranged and introduced the tragic incident that the painful impression which is perhaps too sensible in the reading is lost sight of in the acting. He omitted upon the stage the scene of Claudio's agitation on overhearing Hero, in order that he might thus avoid the gloom, and not weaken the comic scene in which a trap is laid for the listening Beatrice. The burlesque scenes of the constables, whose relation to the main action we have intimated, are introduced with the impending tragic events, that they may afford a counterbalance to them and prevent them from having too lively an effect on the spectator. But, above all, we are already aware that the authors of the deception are in custody before Hero's disgrace in the church takes place; we know, therefore, that all the ado about her crime and death is for nothing. This tact of the poet in the structure of his comedy corresponds with that in the design of Claudio's character, and in the unusually happy contrast which he has presented to him in Benedick. With regard to Claudio's character, Shakespeare has so blended the elements in his nature he has given such a good foundation of honour and self-reliance to his unstable mind and fickle youth—that we cannot, with all our disapprobation of his conduct, be doubtful as to his character. Changeable as he is, he continues stable in no choice

of friends and loved ones, since he had never continuously tested them; at the slightest convulsion of events he is overpowered by first impressions, and he is without the strength of will to search to the bottom of things. This would be an odious and despicable character, if the changeableness were not tempered by the excitability of a tender feeling of honour. Our interest in Claudio is secured by this blending of the moral elements in his nature; but the foundation for a comedy and for a comic character does not appear to lie either in him or in the whole action in which Claudio is implicated. If we separate it from the rest, we shall retain a painful and not a cheerful impression. The poet has thus added the connection between Benedick and Beatrice, in order to produce a merry counterbalance to the more serious and primary element of the play, and to make the former predominate. The same self-love and the same spoiling by prosperity fall to the lot of these two characters as they did to Claudio. But, instead of his changeableness, we see in them only what, with a fine distinction, we should (with Benedick) call giddiness. We connect the idea of changeableness with a continual wavering after resolutions taken; that of giddiness with unstable opinions and inclinations before the same; changeableness manifests itself in actions, it is productive of pernicious consequences, and for this reason causes contempt and hatred; giddiness manifests itself only in contrary processes of the mind, which are by nature of a harmless kind, and this is the reason why it offers excellent material for comedy. Few characters, therefore, on the stage have such truly comic power as these two, Benedick and Beatrice, and they have not lost their popularity in England even to the present day. Shakespeare's contemporary, Leonard Digges, speaks of them together with Falstaff and Malviolo as the favourites of the public of that day; as characters which filled pit, gallery, and boxes in a moment, while Ben Jonson's comedies frequently did not pay for fire and door-keeper. And not long ago Much Ado About Nothing was performed at the Princess's Theatre in London; the two principal parts were executed comparatively well by players who perhaps possessed no extraordinary gifts, but who had mutual pleasure in their acting; and their acting, as in the play itself, was a struggle and a contest, as it used to be formerly in the representation of these characters by Garrick and Mrs. Pritchard.

To understand the characters of Benedick and Beatrice accurately demands the attentive examination of every word and hint which the poet abundantly furnishes. The prince in serious discourse speaks of Benedick as of a noble strain, of approved valour, and confirmed honesty. We find him, when we can observe his actions, true and sincere to the prince, when he too thinks him faithless to Claudio; and in the case of Hero he is less fickle than the two other friends, he is the only one who thinks at once of a trick on the part of Prince John. Of unquenchable humour, of an indomitable passion for raillery and provocation, he is like all Shakespeare's humourists averse to sentimentality and enthusiasm, and a ridiculer of poetry and love. If we listen to his teasing enemy, Beatrice, he is an inconstant man, who changes his friendships like a fashion, a cowardly boaster but a brave eater, a self-sufficient chatterer, and a jester who misuses his wit for calumniation, and who is melancholy from vanity if his jokes are not laughed at. None of this slander seriously affects him but the nickname of jester; perplexed and wounded, he takes counsel with himself as to whether his merry vein had really procured him this title. Pride of intellect is the strong point of his self-love, which is as powerful in him as in Claudio; it appears in him and becomes excitable and sensitive as soon as he is seriously reproached. It is exhibited also in the vitiated taste which he displays when speaking of his relation to the other sex. He imagines himself to be in favour with all women, but none is right to him; she who is to attract him must unite all conceivable graces in herself. But while he believes in all the good qualities of women, he believes not in their fidelity; mistrust is one source of his averseness to the marriage into which he has more and more reasoned himself. From this conviction of the changeableness of women, and from vanity, he has forced himself, as Claudio says, not without constraint, into the part of an obstinate heretic in the contempt of beauty; he openly displays this contempt; he offers a wager, and challenges the most unsparing wit against himself, if he should ever marry.

For a being of Beatrice's sharp wit, the attitude which Benedick assumes against her sex presents a twofold challenge of an opposite kind: it provokes her to chastise him for his arrogance and to inspire him with a better opinion. According to the serious judgment of those who know her, she is endowed

with unquestionable mental and moral excellence, but this is concealed under the veil of constant gaiety. She was born, as she says, under a dancing star, only created to 'speak all mirth and no matter,' she makes a point of keeping her heart on 'the windy side of care,' and of removing every unpleasant impression far from her; there is little of the melancholy element in her; she is never sad but when she sleeps, and not even sad then; she awakes laughing over dreams full of wild tricks. Those around her like to see her only in her cheerful animated behaviour; her jests to her friends are of a friendly character; and when she fears to wound she begs forgiveness for her boldness. If we listen indeed to what Benedick says of her, she is a bad and dangerous woman, an 'Até in good apparel,' a Fury and a Harpy, whose absence makes hell quiet, whose tongue is as quick as it is poisonous. And so far these invectives are true: she is superior to Benedick in rapid striking wit; she possesses with the utmost quickness of the tongue that also of the eye, the keenest observation; and a self-love similar to that of Benedick, and pride in her own talents, tempt her to make sometimes a dangerous use of them. Like him she is touched and easily affected when serious blame meets her; those, indeed, who relentlessly lash the bad points of all men would not have discovered hers. She has the same nice taste with respect to men that Benedick has with respect to women; she has laughed away a succession of suitors; the young and the old, the talkative and the silent, satisfy her not. In her treatment of Benedick, moreover, she is irresistibly provoked to punish his contempt of women with greater contempt of men, his wit with wit more rude and more offensive. She declares herself agreed with him in that point, in order that she may form all the more striking contrast to him. She acts the sworn vestal, who delights to lead her apes to the gates of hell and to be happy with maidens in heaven; she would rather hear anything than a man's protestations of love; wooing, wedding, and repenting she sees following each other in necessary succession; and in the same spirit of contradiction she swears to her uncle that she will never take a husband.

This proud, presumptuous, self-conceited contempt of both for each other and for the whole sex is presently to be caught in a clumsy trap, and to have a comic fall. The net placed for [illegible]m by their friends is simple indeed, but well adapted to the [illegible]cters, and to the relation in which they are placed. They

are both self-loving, and fastidious from self-love, and this has produced in them a contempt of the whole other sex and an exclusive regard for the one exception, who defies this very self-love. This exaggerated condition necessitates the overturning of the obstinate aversion which they avow. For in their innermost soul neither of the two has renounced all love. When Benedick reflects upon it by himself, he considers certainly Claudio's desertion and variableness in this respect as very laughable, but he by no means promises that in an extraordinary case the same may not happen to him. In favour with all women, as he believes, only not with Beatrice, this alone is stimulus enough to draw his attention to her; he finds her besides, from the very first, more beautiful than the little Hero. Both are in their merry nature and jesting qualities far too exclusively thrown upon each other for their bantering war not to have in it an element of peace and a germ of love. For Beatrice is on her side just as little wholly unattracted by the charms of love and marriage. How pleasurable the interest she takes in the happiness of Hero and Claudio! With what gentle teasing she turns back three times to the bridal pair and wishes them joy! How the sigh escapes her in the midst, that *she* may sit in a corner and cry heigh ho! for a husband! She has already pondered over the moderation that must take place in Benedick's nature, if he is to please her, when she wishes that in his talkativeness he had half the melancholy and half the silence of Prince John. In the introductory scene she inquires urgently of the messenger after all his bad qualities, that she may hear his good ones, and afterwards she confesses to us that she knows his worth not merely through report. She does indeed early that which we find her doing subsequently, she 'trans-shapes' his virtues, and then sighs that he is the properest man in Italy. Similarly as they are formed in nature and mind, a similar delight in each other has half drawn them together, but their spirit of contradiction holds them apart and threatens to divide them for ever. At the masked ball they mutually fall into the doubting conviction that they seriously entertain a bad opinion of each other. She believes that he has spoken evil of her, she is irritated at his remark that she had her good wit out of the *Hundred Merry Tales;* he, on his side, is out of humour, because she has called him the prince's jester. This disagreement is immediately followed by the plot of the friends to make them fall in love with each other. The plan is founded on the

self-love of both. To each of the two they first speak his own praise, and then urge the worth of the other; before each they declare the world's blame of their pride, and they infinitely flatter the pride of each by declaring that such a praise-worthy being, one so difficult to conquer and so froward even in defeat, may be brought to subjection.

This flattered self-love is the bait by which both allow themselves inconsiderately to be caught. They acknowledge their pride and their repulsive manner, and resolve without the slightest scruple to heal the sufferings and to requite the love of the other. He only calls to mind his giddiness, which he expressly acknowledges at the end of the play, and the raillery which threatens him from his friends at this change of resolution; this opposition does not occur at all to the more sensible, more deeply affected woman. Both are still further confirmed in the belief of their mutual love by the plotters, who in their conversation incidentally discover somewhat of that which should be a secret to both. 'I know who loves him,' says Claudio to Benedick, and Margaret rallies Beatrice stingingly upon her admirer; both must look upon this as a fresh confirmation of that which they think they have learned by slily listening. She is now sick at heart; she has dropped her wit and Margaret brings it forward against her; she involuntarily sighs her heigh ho! after the man of her heart. Benedick, on the other hand, becomes more silent; he feigns tooth-ache in order to escape the derision of his malicious friends; he appears on the scene in more careful attire, just as he had before teasingly remarked of Claudio; when they banter him upon his brushed hat and his smell of musk, they snatch away his hat and handkerchief to examine them, while he stands comically defenceless before the wit of the unsparing mockers, abandoned to his just punishment. With all this change it would have been difficult to the two lovers in the midst of their hostile raillery to have come to a serious explanation; the concluding scene itself proves this, after events have led to this explanation. This is brought about by the heartless scene which Claudio prepares for Hero in the church. The better nature of Beatrice bursts forth to light amid this base ill-treatment. Her true love for Hero, her deep conviction of her innocence, her anger at the designed malice of her public dishonour, stir up her whole soul and convert it into a perfect contrast to that which we have seen in her hitherto. This scene possesses infinite

effect, when performed without the least caricature, displaying these acutely sensitive natures in all their agitation of feeling, yet without falling into a sentimental tone of which they are incapable. Sorrow for Hero and for the honour of her house makes Beatrice gentle, tender, and weakened into tears; this 'happy hour' facilitates to both their serious confession. But at the same time this hour of misfortune tests these beings, accustomed as they are only to jest and raillery, by a heavy trial, in the sustaining of which we are convinced that these gifted natures are not devoid of that seriousness of life which regards no earnest situation with frivolity. We should more readily have imputed this gift to Claudio, but we find it existing far more in the humorous couple who had not taken life so lightly, and who had at least accustomed themselves to truth. Beatrice places before Benedick the cruel choice between her esteem and love and his connection with his friend. His great confidence in her, and in *her* unshaken confidence in Hero, lead him to make his difficult decision, in which he acts with vigour and prudence, very differently to Claudio in his difficulties. Beatrice, the untamed colt, learns at the same time how the most masculine woman cannot dispense with assistance in certain cases; she has moreover seen her Benedick in a position in which he responds to her ideal of a man, in whom mirth and seriousness should be justly blended. Even Schlegel considered it well-conceived that Shakespeare, in order to prevent these friends of mirth from being confounded with jesters by profession, brought them to a point upon which they understood no trifling. The whole course of this mischance, as it affected in its results even this merry couple, possesses a striking analogy with the close of Love's Labour's Lost. In that play Rosaline tests the mocker Biron in consequence of the exhortation of fate, in this play fate itself tests both and finds them prepared for a serious course of life. Benedick goes off the stage with a confession of his giddiness, but it is a giddiness overcome, and we have no reason to be anxious either for the constancy or peaceableness of this pair. The poet has bestowed upon them two names of happy augury.

It is not every reader of the play who has thus regarded it. Mrs. Jameson was inclined to stake little hope upon the domestic peace of these warlike wooers; Campbell went so far as to call Beatrice an odious woman. We will not specially enter into an examination of these expressions, but will only connect with

them two general observations which will be here in place. With respect to the value of Shakespeare's humorous characters in themselves, we must not be led astray by the excellence and readiness of their wit and intellectual powers, and draw any conclusion from these as to their moral and general estimation in the eye of the poet himself. We have already had too frequent occasion to make this remark, for us to wish to dwell upon it here. But for the comic characters throughout, it is well, if once for all, we view them as a kind of society in which Shakespeare has never introduced traits of a profound nature or of powerful passions. Great and exalted virtues and heavy crimes are in general excluded from this soil, unless in the plays which, according to our distinction, we would rather call dramas (*Schauspiele*) than comedies, such as the Merchant of Venice, Cymbeline, and Measure for Measure. In the comedies the characters are disfigured and distinguished only by faults and excellencies of a lighter kind, and the highest excellence attached to the most conspicuous personages is only of comparative value. The tragic struggle with vast passions, the shock against the dark powers which guide the destinies of man, and deeds of unwonted sacrifice and strength of will, are not here to be found; they would destroy the character of the comedy, which is levelled against the weaknesses of human nature, and which, therefore, moves in the usual track of social intercourse, among men of an ordinary mould. In this point of view we are justified in seeing in Beatrice and Benedick more realistic natures, not to be compared, it must be admitted, with Petruchio and Katharine, but on the other hand not even bearing the ideal colouring of Rosalind and Orlando. In Shakespeare's spirit we must not despise this ruder realistic nature; in his spirit also we must just as little overrate it. If with regard to Beatrice and the women of this sort in Shakspeare we would wish to fathom the poet's own estimation, after attentive consideration we readily arrive at the conclusion that at different periods of his life this varied perhaps with himself. We have before drawn attention to the fact, that in the plays belonging to Shakespeare's early period there is a remarkable preponderance of bad women; the poet's own experience appeared at that time to have inspired him with no advantageous opinion of the female sex. In the second period another type of female character prevails. We cannot mistake a certain family resemblance between Silvia in the Two Gentlemen of

Verona, Rosaline and her companions, Portia and Nerissa, Rosalind and Beatrice. All of these possess in different degrees that vein of wit which makes them mistresses of conversation, and which, however modest the heart may be, often permits the tongue to speak immodestly; they have almost all a preponderating development of the understanding, of the intellectual powers, often too of those of the will, a development which at times seems to step beyond the limits of the feminine nature. They have all more or less something of unwomanly forwardness in their nature, something of domineering superiority; and therefore the men in contact with them play more or less a subordinate part, or at any rate have trouble in making themselves a match for the women of their choice.

Shakespeare must at that time in London, in the wider circle of his acquaintance, and in his intercourse with the higher classes, have become intimate with women who withdrew him suddenly from his former ill-humour with the sex into a devoted admiration of them. In his Portia he has depicted an ideal of womanhood, bordering on perfection, not to be surpassed by any man in strength of will and self-mastery, in mind and circumspection. In his later works Shakespeare has rather dropped this kind of feminine ideal. A still deeper intimacy with woman's nature made him at last tarry with greater delight on the feeling side of the womanly character, and with slight touches he delineated those tender beings, who persevere rather in the sphere of instinctive life which is assigned to the woman, who avoid immodest words as well as actions, who are devoid of intellectual superiority, but who possess, in the purity of their feelings, a far more certain power than those former favourites of Shakespeare exercised in their wit. In that earlier period Shakespeare would hardly have expressed with emphasis, as in Lear, that 'a voice ever soft, gentle, and low was an excellent thing in woman.' He has indeed even at that period depicted those characters of retired feminine modesty, a Bianca, a Hero, and a Julia in the Two Gentlemen of Verona, but he kept them much in the back-ground; his Juliet in Romeo stands in a just medium between the two classes of female characters which we perceive in Shakespeare's plays. Subsequently, however, he placed his Viola, Desdemona, Perdita, Ophelia, Cordelia and Miranda, in the foreground of the scenes; and that most charming of all, Imogen, whom he raised even above the highly sustained ideal of Portia. In this manner Shakespeare's know-

ledge of the female sex became more and more refined, and his female characters rise in inner value and in moral beauty in the same degree as they lose outward brilliancy and intellectual acuteness. But to which class of women Shakespeare adjudged the higher value we may easily infer from the one fact that he restricted the former to his comedies alone, and gave the preference to the latter in his tragedies, in which the profoundest side of human nature in both sexes first comes in question.

TWELFTH-NIGHT; OR, WHAT YOU WILL.

'WHAT you Will' was performed on February 2, 1602, as we learn from the diary of the barrister Manningham, who assisted at the representation, and who was struck with the similarity of the piece to Plautus' 'Menæchmi' and the Italian play *Gl' Inganni*. The sources which Shakespeare may have had before him, are in the first place these very *Inganni*, a comedy performed in 1547, and printed in 1582. Also Bandello's tale (II. 36), 'The Twins,' and another Italian comedy several times published, *Gl' Ingannati* (comedia degli Academici intronati di Siena) which is an alteration of the 'Engaños' of the Spanish poet Lope de Rueda, a piece which more faithfully follows Bandello's novel. Besides these, in Barnaby Rich's 'Farewell to Military Profession,' 1581, there is a tale of Apollonius and Silla, which treats the same subject, namely the connection of the four lovers. It is hard to say to which of these sources Shakespeare is most indebted, as he in truth stands equally remote from all; so remote indeed, that we may leave the connection of his comedy with them wholly unexamined. The comic elements are entirely Shakespeare's own; the love-affairs are treated in those tales and comedies so superficially, so coarsely and so dissimilarly in every way, that the bare externals of the plot can alone have afforded the poet a mere suggestion; namely the series of confusions between the duke who loves the countess, and the countess who loves the page, and the page who loves the duke, until the brother of the page steps between, and the difficulties vanish. Even in this circumstance, the errors which arise from the similarity of the twins Sebastian and Viola, and which call to mind the 'Menæchmi,' are Shakespeare's addition. By this addition the scene acquires greater extent; it connects the main action with the occurrences between Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, the intricacy and liveliness is increased, and the wholly unexpected conclusion, the surprising and

exciting catastrophe is gained by it, and this contrasts peculiarly with the quiet issue of As you Like It.

However successfully the plot is woven out of these complexities, no importance is laid upon it, as is the case in all Shakespeare's more finished works. The progress of the poet compared to the time when he executed the Comedy of Errors, may be proved here by a tangible instance. That was truly a comedy of intrigue; in our discussion of the play we have already indicated how much unnaturalness was comprehended in this mere definition, and to how many improbabilities the writer was exposed. Shakespeare has here avoided this. The similarity of the twins pre-supposed, the possibility of the mistake is accounted for by the fact that Viola has intentionally put on the same dress as her brother; the probability of the meeting is a matter of course, as both, after they have suffered shipwreck, would from their station and acquaintance seek safety at the court of the inhospitable Illyria. The unnaturalness of the seeking brother not being reminded at the first mistake of the one sought, is here wholly avoided. As soon as at the first strange meeting Antonio utters the name of Sebastian in the presence of Viola, she conceives a hope of her brother's life, and guesses the state of things, which she cannot at the moment explain. But even by this the possibility of longer deception is cut off, and the plot loses the significance which would otherwise be given to it. The matter in question in this play, as in all others, is not the plot, the outward web of the action, but the actors themselves and their nature and motives; it is not the effect, but the cause and the agencies. If we examine these, the resemblance of the story with that of the Comedy of Errors is at once wholly lost sight of, and we discover rather an affinity between this piece and Love's Labour's Lost, where the importance of the plot was so small, and so remarkable a stress

doth suck the mother's milk it taketh first a sup of the cup of error. In all other things, wherein we show ourselves to be most drunken with this poisoned cup, it is in our actions of love; for the lover is so estranged from all that is right, and wandereth so wide from the bounds of reason, that he is not able to deem white from black, good from bad. If a question might be asked, what is the ground indeed of reasonable love, whereby the knot is knit of true and perfect friendship, I think those that be wise would answer—desert: for to love them that hate us, to follow them that fly from us, to fawn on them that frown on us, to curry favour with them that disdain us, to be glad to please them that care not how they offend us; who will not confess this to be an erroneous love, neither grounded upon wit nor reason? Wherefore in this historie following, you shall see Dame Error play her part with a leash of lovers, a male and two females.' Here again in the sense of the passage which we quoted before from Thomas Heywood, love in itself, love at any rate without desert would be represented as a folly; the lovers would, as we say, have made fools of themselves, the Duke to Olivia, Olivia to Viola, and Viola to the Duke, without meeting with a return. But this again would be only an intrigue, a love-affair, a situation, which in Shakespeare's eyes, in order to have a poetic attraction, must first have a psychological foundation. His first enquiry was as to the kind of nature, both of the beings and of the love, which could possibly and probably have fallen into the foolish error of a hopeless passion; to this enquiry he found no sort of answer in his authorities; the answer, which *he* gave to it in his play, explains it to us on all points!

As in Love's Labour's Lost, so in What you Will, two different strata of society are represented—characters of a more refined organization, and caricatures in which the vices of human nature grow as luxuriantly as weeds. Just as in Love's Labour's Lost, taking our start from glaring sketches of this sort, we more readily found the key to the less obvious characters of the nobler personages, so is it also here; these characters are Shakespeare's addition, and precisely in them must he all the more distinctly indicate the reason for which he added them, and brought them to bear on the original part of the story. In the centre of this lower group stands Malvolio. He is an austere puritan; his crossed garters point him out as such; to him therefore the demand, required of him from the clown in his

character of parson, is doubly wicked, namely that he should hold the opinions of Pythagoras on the transmigration of souls. Pedantic, more than economical, conscientious and true, grave and sober, he is a servant suitable to Olivia's melancholy bias, to her moral severity, and to her maidenly reserve; she prefers him, and he ingratiates himself into her favour, he watches an opportunity for punishing the rough youngsters, who make an alehouse of his lady's palace; he acts the talebearer and informer; his eye is everywhere; he brings Fabian out of favour about a bear-baiting; the captain, who saved Viola, is scarcely landed, when Malvolio has him apprehended on account of a quarrel. He regards himself as far superior to the society in his mistress' house; he considers the wise men, who can be pleased with fools and their jests no better than fools themselves; he looks down contemptuously on the 'shallow things,' Toby, Fabian, and Maria, who persecute him with the bitterest malevolence on account of his time-serving, his affectation, and his assumed importance. He is sick of self-love, so says the countess herself to him; he is the best persuaded of himself, and thinks himself 'crammed' with excellencies; when the countess laughingly upbraids him with his intolerable dress, he takes it for serious praise. It is his ground of faith that all who look on him love him; thus a single word from the rogish Maria has already kindled in him the idea that Olivia 'affects' him. That she so strikingly rejects the Duke is another proof to him that he is more congenial to her melancholy humour. Even before Maria places the letter in his way, with which she means to make his unbounded self-conceit a 'nay word,' he regards himself in the prospect of the dignity of count, and loses himself in inflated fancies. After he has read the letter, he doubts no longer that Olivia commands him seriously to 'cast his slough' and to abandon his servile nature. He now learns the letter by heart, and does literally what it requires of him. He regards the happiness, into the haven of which he thinks to steer in perfect security, as the direct work of the care of Jove for his highly important person, when in fact only the 'shallow things,' whom he considered so far beneath him, are making him run aground on the shoals of his own self-conceit. Self-love is, therefore, in this comical character also the distinguishing feature of his nature; it has degenerated into that degree of self-conceit which fancies itself able to master all, because it sees itself not only at the aim of perfection, but also of the happiness which belongs to this per-

fection. In Malvolio, therefore, this self-conceit imagines a 'desert,' without a shadow of reality having given cause for it, and even without an emotion of his own love being called into play. Like the false love of glory in those caricatures of Holofernes and Armado, his self-conceit had instinctively grown up to such a degree that it is unconscious of itself, that nothing brings it to self-knowledge or improvement; the follies and caprices which spring up in him grow into gigantic size, whether trampled down or nurtured.

The reverse to this caricature is the squire Sir Andrew. He is a melancholy picture of what man would be without any self-love, the source indeed of so many weaknesses. To this straight-haired country squire, life consists only in eating and drinking; eating beef, he himself fears, has done harm to his wit; in fact he is stupid even to silliness, totally deprived of all passion, and thus of all self-love or self-conceit. He looks up to the awkward Sir Toby, as well as to the adroit fool, as paragons of urbane manners, and seeks to copy their phraseology; he is the parrot and the utterly thoughtless echo of Sir Toby; he thinks to have everything, to be and to have been all that Sir Toby was and had; he repeats his words and imitates him, without even understanding what he says. The dissolute Sir Toby has brought him forward as a suitor for Olivia, that he may fleece him; but the poor suitor himself believes not in his success, and is ever on the point of departing. He despairs of his manners, and the cold sweat stands on his brow if his business is only with the chamber-maid. He repeats indeed after Sir Toby that he too was adored once; but we see, while he says it, by the stupid face, that on *this* point beyond any other he is totally without experience. He has never been so conceited as to believe himself seriously regarded by any; his mistrust of himself is as great as his mistrust of others is small. When Sir Toby seeks to persuade him and others that he is a linguist, a courtier, a musician, a dancer, and a fencer, the desire seizes him for a moment perhaps, after his corrupter has dragged him away to drink wine against his will, to look a little at himself; but close behind this paroxysm of feeble and trifling conceit there lurks ever a renouncing of self and a contempt of all his gifts. Scarcely can poverty of mind be more bluntly derided than when Sir Toby asks him reproachfully if this is 'a world to hide virtues in!' Justice Shallow in Henry IV. had at any rate a vein of bragging

which affects the lacking self-reliance; but Sir Andrew is at best to be compared with his cousin Slender, whose love of bear-baiting he also shares. His apathy and cowardice are all the more plainly brought to life from his quarrelsome disposition, and from the disputes into which he is led; if his mentor Tobias had not done it, his courage would never have urged him even against the maiden-like youth, Viola; the utmost extent of his boldness towards Malvolio is to send him a challenge and then to break his word. Thus this precious man, to whom Sir Toby assigns not so much 'blood as will clog the foot of a flea,' is a hopeless and inconsolable wooer, not like Malvolio from self-conceit, but rather from the entire lack of all that can be called self-love or reciprocal love. Between them both, in a skilfully sketched, though rather remote contrast, the poet has placed Sir Toby, who cheats his friend of his horses and ducats, whilst he decoys him with the prospect of his niece's hand. A drunkard, a coarse realist of the lowest sort, he yet possesses a slyness in seeing through the weaknesses of men who do not lie beyond his range of vision; rough and awkward in his manners, he yet so far knows how to assume the fashions of the town as to impose on Sir Andrew; impudent enough to make an alehouse of Olivia's palace, and to take no heed when she orders him to leave, he yet knows how to keep on good footing with the servants of the house. He has nothing of the high soaring vanity of Malvolio, but yet he looks down with blunt pride not merely upon Sir Andrew and Malvolio, but upon the clown and Olivia; and he believes himself adored by Maria, the only one whose volubility gives him the impression of superiority. However, his egotism manifests itself in that dangerous manner in which Falstaff considered inferior minds as his natural prey; he avails himself of the weaknesses of others, that he may play them deceitful or teasing tricks. In this he is seconded and surpassed by Maria, with whom he entangles himself in the common plot against Malvolio; cunningly and flatteringly she ensnares him; and the ready spider carries off the heavy fly as a prey, as her husband. The one who, with his arrogance of rank, aspires higher, forfeits his chimerical hope; the other, who with rude arrogance looks down upon his companions, is ensnared unexpectedly and almost without his will by a witty maiden far below his own rank, who will try her cunning hereafter in

persuading him to better manners with better result during their married life than before.

As in Love's Labour's Lost, the caricatures of the burlesque part of the comedy are placed by the side of a series of characters in whom the same fault lies concealed, which in those caricatures shot forth like a wild growth of nature into extravagant forms; a fault, indiscernible outwardly from the veil of refined cultivation, but in its nature not dissimilar from that manifested in them; so it is in this play. This same Olivia, to whom Malvolio's thoughts soar in laughable fashion, attracts also the eyes and the heart of the duke Orsino, a man who is so endowed with personal pretensions and excellencies, that he seems separated from Malvolio by a still greater distance than the King of Navarre in the other play is from Armado. Olivia herself, who turns coldly from him, considers him virtuous, noble, of stainless youth, free, learned, valiant, gracious in person, and of great estate. His mind, wholly filled with his love for Olivia, seems stirred by deep sentiments of the most sacred tenderness and truth. Sunk in melancholy, he avoids all noisy society; the chase and every other employment is a burden to him; 'unstaid and skittish' in everything, he seems prompted by the desire to compensate for this variability by the firm constancy of his love. To nurture this love with the most delicate and strongest aliments is his sole business; he courts therefore the solitude of nature, and surrounds himself with music. He attracts the clown from the Countess' house, that with his full-sounding voice he may sing to him songs of hopeless unrequited love. A tender poetic soul, the Duke with delicate feeling has made his favourite poetry the popular song of the spinning-room, which is more exquisite and simple in its touching power than aught that lyric art has created in the erotic style; he revels even to satiety in the enjoyment of these soft heart-felt tunes, which are like an echo to the heart. This proneness to go to extremes in his love, in his melancholy, and in all inclinations which are congenial to and in accordance with his ruling passion, is expressed in all that the duke says and does. His desires pursue him 'like fell and cruel hounds;' he loves, in the words of his messenger, 'with adorations, with fertile tears, with groans, that thunder love, and with sighs of fire.' He himself calls his love more noble than the world; he compares it to the insatiable sea; no other love, least of all that of a woman, is like his; he makes a show of it everywhere,

by messengers, before musicians, and companions, and even the sailors know the history of it. But this very inclination to exaggeration induces us to look more closely into the genuineness of this most genuine love. It almost seems as if the Duke were more in love with his love, than with his mistress; as if like Romeo with Rosalind he rather speculated in thought over his fruitless passion, than felt it actually in his heart; as if his love were rather a production of his fancy than a genuine feeling. It startles us, that just that which in a paroxysm of self-loving commendation he said of his own love compared to the love of woman, he himself contradicts in a calm thoughtful moment, when he says to Viola that the fancies of men are more giddy than women's are, more longing, but yet more wavering, sooner lost and worn. Thus is it with his own. To give an air of importance to their love, to pride themselves and to presume upon it, is in truth the habit or rather the bad habit of men. Viola tells him, what is just his case, that men make more words about their love, that they say more, swear more, but their shows are more than will, for they prove much in their vows, but little in their love. Olivia must feel this throughout the urgent suit of the Duke; she calls his love heresy, and turns coldly away from his seeming fervour. She sees him send to her, and she hears of his longing, but she sees him not bestirring himself in his own cause. She hears a claim advanced, but she finds no desert, unless it be that of higher rank; and it is this very superiority in the Duke which she disdains. Must she not have remotely gathered even from his messages the refined conceit of her princely suitor, with which he presumes upon his love: 'it *can* give no place, it *can* bide no denay.' Must she not despise this very tone of rank, in which he bids Cesario tell her that he prizes not a quantity of dirty lands and values not her fortune? Must not all this sound in her ears as if the Duke meant that nothing might and could be lacking to him and his love, as if he grounded his pretensions rather upon his princely rank than upon the high nature of his love? In other instances she is far removed from coldness and contempt; something in the very nature of the Duke must have provoked her proud disdain, and we shall feel that he indeed gave her good cause for this.

That the aim and object of desire are missed by this self-reflection on love, by this melancholy tarrying upon an undefined yearning, by this too-tender nurture of a self-pleasing

passion, and by the languid inactivity which it produces, are shown by Orsino's example; and the poet has not neglected to make this lesson still more forcible by a striking contrast. The fool, no less than Olivia, has seen through the Duke's disease, and he tells him of an excellent remedy. 'I would have men of such constancy,' he says, 'put to sea, that their business might be everything, and their intent everywhere; for that's it, that always makes a good voyage of nothing.' Thus, those natures which, forgetful of all else, become absorbed in one constant affection, he would drive into the very element of adventure, that they might forget their ponderings upon one intent, that in a natural course of life they might be delivered from the hard service of one idol, that that freshness might be restored to them which permits a man even in matters of love to reach his aim more quickly and easily, while the weak votaries of love forfeit their end. Shakespeare has illustrated this in the young Sebastian. For he is just such a youth, free-hearted, uninjured, and virgin-like, who, seeking adventures with his sister, apparently without any definite object, undertook a voyage, suffered shipwreck, and proved himself in the shipwreck a man of courage and hope, a man provident in peril; being cast ashore, he laments for his sister with the utmost tenderness; but, like his sister, he quickly and practically embraces a plan for his immediate future, appearing throughout quick in resolve, vigorous, never weary, and free in mind and action. Inoffensive, trusting to fortune and his good nature, he receives a purse from his captain, without knowing how he is to repay it; he gives a liberal present out of it to be free from a troublesome companion; unexpectedly involved in an adventure of the most strange, most magic nature, he enters into it with deliberate circumspection; drawn into the quarrel of the squires, he at one stroke gives back the blows due, and proves to Olivia that he would know how to free her from her dissolute guests. The charm exercised by a nature at once so fresh and so victorious, Olivia is not alone to experience. The poet has taken care that the instinctive feeling of the Countess should not be construed into womanly weakness, for men of strong nature entirely share it with her. The rough captain Antonio is attracted to this youth by an equally blind impulse of pleasure and love; he loiters about him, in spite of the danger to which he exposes himself in the adverse town; for his sake he takes delight in this danger, and unrestrainedly bestows his love

upon him; he himself calls it a witchcraft which drew him to the joyous dexterous youth.

A feminine contrast to the Duke and his assuming self-conceited love is presented in Viola's unpretending modest nature, and her quiet reserved passion. From the testimony of her brother she is accounted beautiful by all; the Duke, too, considers her lips 'smooth and rubious' as Diana's, and her soft clear maidenlike voice strikes him, when he sees her in the page's dress. 'She bore a mind,' says Sebastian, 'which envy could but call fair.' She is of her brother's harmless nature; enterprising even in misfortune, free and cheerful in spirit, and quick in intelligence when the occasion demands it; but far more conspicious is the compass of her feeling and the quiet modesty of her most womanly nature. When, wrecked and impoverished, she is driven to the inhospitable shore of Illyria, her first wish is to go to Olivia, in order that she might withdraw from the world; when this appears hard to compass, she goes in man's attire to the Duke, whose name she has at least heard in her father's house. Scarcely is she with him than she wins the favour and full confidence of the tender-hearted lover; she is commissioned with his messages to Olivia; but she herself just as quickly conceives an affection for the Duke; *she* herself would be his wife, and she confesses it in secret with one passing sigh. A serious hope of possessing him never occurs to her; she delivers her message with the truest feeling of duty. At the contemptuous meeting which befalls her in Olivia's house, she might think herself justified in retiring, but she does not; from the strict command of her master she even breaks a little through the barriers of courtesy, that she may be admitted to her presence. It is indeed her wish and her interest to see the beloved of her lover face to face. As soon as she perceives her beauty, the playful tone in which she began her conversation sinks into impassioned earnestness. She finds no sense in the denial of a love so suffering as the Duke's; she tells Olivia what she would do were *she* in the Duke's place, to allow *her* no rest:—

> Make me a willow-cabin at your gate,
> And call upon my soul within the house;
> Write loyal cantos of contemned love,
> And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
> Halloo your name to the reverberate hills,
> And make the babbling gossip of the air
> Cry out 'Olivia!'

But it was just this which the Duke did *not* do towards Olivia; he *caused* songs to be sung and repeated, he made her name known through report, he led a deathlike life in retirement, but Olivia herself perceived nothing of a life in his love. And just that which Viola would have done as a man and as a lover, she herself did with respect to the Duke; not in that degree of which she here speaks of the man, not in the noisy manner which she assigns to men, not so urgent and aggressive, but all the more hearty and tender in silent patience. Thus she had indeed made her willow-cabin in the house where her soul dwells, but she guards it with quiet resignation and without pretension. The man who has no power over Olivia captivates *her* heart more and more; his words affect her who hears them from him she knows very differently to the influence of his messages over the distant Olivia; moreover, he touches her heart far more deeply from his hopeless position, which is so analogous to her own. On the other hand, she steals gently, though disguised as a boy, into the heart of the man; in a masterly manner she knows how to speak of the passion which torments him, and his most subtle observations meet with understanding and interpretation from her; her true devotion fascinates him all the more, the less he finds elsewhere a response to his lively feelings. But at the same time she does all that for her love which a woman of her nature in this position ever can do. She might have gone so far in her sincerity as to discover her sex to Olivia; but to this heroism neither does her nature prompt her, nor does she allow her love to reach it; she contents herself with leaving to fate the unravelment of the knot. In the meanwhile she knows how to whisper to the Duke that she shall never love wife as she does him; and in a fortunate hour she tells him, in case the secret of her disguise should ever come to light, the history of her humble adoration, before which his love must stand deeply confounded. It may sound as if she had designed this with premeditated cunning. But it is not so. Orsino's words upon the premature fading of women have moved and touched her in her inmost soul; the clown sings a deeply affecting song full of death longing; and then the Duke gives her his fresh commission with fresh expressions of the superabundance of his love. It is then that full of emotion she tells him the history of a pretended sister, whose life was a blank; who never told her love, but let 'concealment, like a worm i' the bud, feed on her damask cheek;' who

with pale melancholy sat 'like patience on a monument, smiling at grief.' Say, she asks him, 'was not this love, indeed?' and then, overcome by her words, she bursts forth into tears and goes. The issue of the affair needs no justification after this scene, one of the finest that Shakespeare has written. When Orsino at last goes personally to work, and is rejected by Olivia, his shallow love for her turns suddenly into hate and jealousy; he wishes to sacrifice her favourite to his revenge, and the victim offers herself readily to the knife. He now learns that Olivia is married to this favourite, and his hate passes for a moment to Viola. Now for a while this love-lacking heart is a blank; and then when suddenly matters are explained, the noble characters with which Viola has inscribed herself on this heart stand forth in full splendour. The whole charm of this being can be displayed by the actress in this last scene almost by silent acting, while full of womanly shame she first struggles against the confession of her disguise, and is then made happy by the suit of the Duke, who has suddenly learnt from her modest love and its language.

As the central point of the whole action, Olivia stands in a less simple character among the three last sketched figures; her relation to the self-loving trait in the Duke's character is unusually skilfully and delicately woven. As we see her at the very outset, we infer from her bearing that she is a woman of unusual energy. She is mourning the death of her father and brother; for seven years she intends to go veiled, that she may bear the last deceased in remembrance; oppressed by melancholy, she laments in cloisterlike retirement, and has abjured the company of men. The power of feeling which induces such a resolve, and the strength of character which trusts to itself to carry it out, influence her whole nature. She is an august lady of free and serious mind; not of a humour to bear the jests of a messenger, but thoroughly capable of thoughtfully receiving the significant thrusts of her fool; not sufficiently masculine to dismiss with more than words the dissolute relatives who beset her house, but carefully considerate of maintaining order by her puritanical steward and of ruling over her house in a prudent and sober manner. On her seal she bears the chaste Lucrece; she holds Malvolio in honour for the sake of his virtuous zeal; 'my mouse of virtue' is the caressing term which the fool confers upon her; by various traits she sustains the severely moral character which these qualities indicate; she is an enemy

to all fashionable dress, to all gloss within and without; if Viola calls herself her servant, she considers it 'lowly feigning.' This austere virtue might seem to be a constitutional fault. The manner in which she turns her back on the Duke's suit allows us to infer pride, and even a hardness of character, arising from icy coldness; both Orsino and Viola reproach her with this. But in the bearing which she assumes towards the Duke, the principles are still to be perceived which belong to such a character. By her frosty refusal she requites the Duke for the coldness which lies in his apparently ardent proposals; to his pride of rank she opposes an estimable pride of character, and, as the main motive for her refusal, she seems to assert her resolve never to marry above her rank; not without grounds is she averse to the Duke, for she has read his heart and finds his love heresy. Nevertheless, in the manner of her rejection, there is something as unjust in her just pride as in the manner of Orsino's wooing; the words which she speaks to the Duke personally, witness to an aversion expressed with cruel severity; she has never tried to know the Duke as Viola knows him; the latter cannot, therefore, understand her pride, and wishes her the avenging requital of a similar contempt. This wish is immediately realised through Viola herself and through the evil enemy that lurks in her disguise; Olivia's pride is to meet with a similar fall as that of the Duke's through herself; the Duke, with his artificial passion, biassed by his pride of rank, loses his object; Olivia, with her suddenly awakened affection, which in its violence subdues all her pride of character, errs for a time in her object. As soon as Viola from the depths of her innermost experience has named the steps she would take were she in Orsino's place, this love-breathing tone strikes fire at once into Olivia's bereaved heart; the flame kindled in Viola is transferred to her, she becomes suddenly restless and absent, inquires after the servant's parentage, fixes her eyes steadfastly upon him, sends him a ring, and invites him to come again. That she is not haughty by nature comes here suddenly to light; that she is not cold is shown by this enkindled passion; she is even far removed from the tender, deeply feminine nature with which Viola bears and conceals her love. Indeed, with the same eagerness as that with which she had before expressed her aversion to Orsino, she now pursues this awakening passion; then as now she is overpowered by one energetic feeling which she actively follows out, far removed from bearing it patiently like

Viola. Like the latter she gives vent to a fatalistic expression, as if she would suffer herself to be ruled by fate; but at the same moment, far more than Viola, she lends a hand to fate, by sending the ring after the messenger. Viola succeeds in bearing her love in painful secrecy, but Olivia is obliged to confess that 'a murderous guilt shows not itself more soon than love that would seem hid.' She passes from the one extreme of a somewhat intense melancholy and resignation to the other extreme of ardent passion. That which the Duke had anticipated from the first becomes true:—

> She that hath a heart of that fine frame,
> To pay this debt of love but to a brother,
> How will she love, when the rich golden shaft
> Hath killed the flock of all affections else
> That live in her.

Wit and understanding, virtue and honour, pride and self-reliance—nothing is able to master this passion in her. With open eye and ear she might have avoided the whole mistake of, thus losing her heart in the wrong place. Her moral nature struggles with her love, and she inquires anxiously whether Viola thinks disadvantageously of her honour. When she is rejected, her pride rises on the side of her honour, her position, and her understanding, which alike speak against her passion. 'Why then, methinks,' she says, collecting herself, 'tis time to smile again.' Up to this point we might believe that in her love, as in the Duke's, somewhat of pride of rank was at work, and that she wooed the lowly page regardlessly, sure of success, as if she could not fail, and that she now draws back suddenly cooled, as the Duke had done from her. But it is just here that we perceive that her passion is of quite another metal to that of the Duke. Even her pride, her last weapon against her overpowering feeling, is blunted; she perceives her fault, but headstrong it mocks reproof; a fiend, she confesses, like Viola, might bear her soul to hell; she reads scorn in her countenance, but she feels that it looks beautiful in her; she would even gain the disdainful youth by bribery. We see indeed that if in her bearing towards the Duke she displayed somewhat of his pride in her character, she now, in her impetuous passion for a servant whom she had scarcely known, developes somewhat of the bold adventurous character of Sebastian, with whom the same good fortune brings her into contact. 'Love sought is good,' she says, 'but given unsought is better.' The latter, Sebastian

meets with in her, and she also in Sebastian, although she was conscious of having plainly sought it. It is indeed by a pure chance, interrupting the hitherto strictly psychological course, that she meets Sebastian, but the poet has excellently made use of this in order to lead us to overlook the improbability of the circumstance. She meets him in agitation, anger, and care for his life; she believes that he too, her imagined Cesario, is in similar agitation; the quarrel with the rough fellows, it must seem to her, have called into play the more manly powerful nature which she had not hitherto perceived in him; all the more must he now please her. She finds him who was before so refractory now suddenly inclined, and this must be an intoxicating joy to her. In her 'extracting frenzy,' as she herself calls her condition, she forgets every other business, but never her own dignity and her noble behaviour; jealous and doubtful in her soul, she chains her unexpectedly obtained favourite indissolubly to herself in the bonds of marriage. From the lack of restraint throughout the victorious career of her love, she has yet to endure a moment of anxiety and shame, but the spectator knows already that the palm of victory and happiness is guaranteed to this bold passion, which has fully eradicated in her all pride, even the pride of position, and that of rejection, provoked by rejection.

There yet remains to us to say a word upon the fool Feste, to whom the poet has in this play assigned a very peculiar position. He appears quite out of all the action, out of the reach both of chance and of the passions which are at work throughout the play. We could almost fancy that he was brought into the different scenes only to act the witty entertainer, or, as he calls himself, the corrupter of words, or indeed that his part was designed for a favourite singer. It is striking that in all the comedies which we have been now examining—indeed in all Shakespeare's plays of this period, in Henry VIII., in Measure for Measure, in Hamlet, Othello, and Cæsar—the musical element appears. The Blackfriars company may about this time have been in a fortunate connection with singers and composers; thus in Much Ado About Nothing, where a song is put into Balthazar's mouth, and the folio edition of 1623 substitutes the name of the singer, Jack Wilson, for Balthazar, Rimbault has endeavoured to prove that this singer was no other than a well-known John Wilson, subsequently Doctor of Music at Oxford. Here also, the fool appears as a singer by profession,

singing with equal skill love-songs of a merry and tragic nature, comic jigs and heart-rending canons. With all this he is a careless cheerful fellow, troubling himself about nothing, placed in the midst of the busy company, a wise fool among the foolish wise. No other of Shakespeare's fools is so conscious of his superiority as this one. He says it indeed too often, and he shows still oftener that his foolish wisdom is in fact no folly, that it is a mistake to call him a fool, that the cowl does not make the monk, that his brain is not so motley as his dress. The poet has not in this play brought the words and actions of the fool into relation with the one main idea of the piece, but he has opposed him rather to the separate characters in separate expressions. It is in this play that that instructive passage occurs, which designates the fool's difficult office as demanding that he should 'observe their mood on whom he jests, the quality of persons, and the time, and check at every feather that comes before his eye;' this is exactly the part which Shakespeare has made the fool here play. He is fit for anything; he lives with each after his own fashion, knowing their weaknesses, considering their nature, carefully adapting himself to the mood of the moment. When anyone, Viola or the Duke, wishes to speak with his mistress, he knows how to beg gracefully; when he sings to the melancholy Duke, he refuses recompense; he deprecates expressly the idea of his begging being construed into covetousness. He boasts of being a good steward, but in the dissolute society of the squires he is himself also a little mad; yet not so mad as to allow even their bloody tricks to pass unpunished. He knows how to discriminate between persons as well as between time and place. With natural, fresh, free natures, such as Sebastian and Viola, he is at once on a friendly footing. On the other hand he punishes Malvolio for the contempt with which he speaks of him and his profession; he joins in playing him the trick which is to cure his self-conceit, and he tells him this with impressive warning, in case of repetition. To Sir Andrew he talks glaring nonsense which enchants him; he knows that he passes for no fox with the coarse Sir Toby, the more craftily and easily he watches Maria, as she lays her bait to the churl of 'most weak *pia mater*,' and he praises her as the most witty of her sex, if she can wean him from drinking. To his mistress Olivia he is faithfully devoted, as one belonging to her house; he condemns the extravagance of her incipient melancholy; he distinctly

designates the affair between her and the Duke as foolish; he promotes the connection with Viola and Sebastian. He keenly penetrates the Duke's changeable disposition, and bitingly although good-naturedly upbraids him with it; at the same time he tells him, as we have before mentioned, of a remedy which exactly gives a key to the inward condition of the lover's character. If the fool be cleverly played, it can, therefore, be a guide through the most important points of this comedy.

In common with the Merry Wives of Windsor and the Taming of the Shrew, What You Will is the purest and merriest comedy which Shakespeare has written. In the Comedy of Errors, in Love's Labour's Lost, in As You Like It, in Much Ado About Nothing, tragic incidents interrupt the course of comedy. Here there is nothing of the kind; even the sentimental and at first somewhat elegiac connection between the lovers takes a cheerful turn from the mistakes between Sebastian and Viola. In this manner the burlesque part of the comedy becomes conspicuous, reaching such an extent of excess and wantonness, that even Fabian declared that the self-conceit of Malvolio, represented on the theatre, would appear an improbable invention, and he calls the absurdity of Sir Andrew suitable to a Carnival frolic. The piece, according to its title, was intended for Twelfth Night, the eve which ushers in the Carnival, a season in which at that day in England, as at the present time with us, bean-kings were chosen by lot, merry court-scenes were acted in family circles, and masquerades for the purpose were performed in the theatres. For a mad season such as this, mad jests are here presented, as it were, for choice (What You Will). And the piece in truth is constituted throughout to make a strong impression of the maddest mirth. Rightly conceived and acted by players who even in caricature do not miss the line of beauty, it has an incredible effect. The Germans, indeed, in the representation of such plays, miss the English tradition, and above all the ease of movement and the absence of all artificial and affected histrionic action. In the representation of the Shakespearian comedies on the English stage, even at the present day, the most lively action prevails, and every player appears as if in his simple easy nature. As no prompter suggests, the actor is compelled to possess himself of his part, so that, as it were, he lives rather than acts that which he has to perform. The protraction of the answers, and the heavy lengthening of light scenes which ought to pass on rapidly, are

thus prevented; the answer of the one addressed interrupts the last word of the speaker; the exit off the stage is so managed that the speakers pass off with the last syllable; with their departure one scene changes and a new one begins; the intervals between the different acts last but a few minutes; thus such a piece passes quickly before us and carries us with it; the exact delineation of any single situation is nevertheless stamped deeply on the mind. But for this even the subordinate parts must be performed by clever actors; the players must not be a second idle; all of them, even the mute persons, even the silent spectators of the action, must suit the circumstances of the case, according to the nature of every moment. But that which in Germany almost always spoils the Shakespearian pieces, in addition to lack of refinement and psychological knowledge, is the want in most actors of all natural and easy style. Their smooth, soulless, declamatory manner, devoid of all inner life, is at once fatal to these pieces, which should be performed in the tone of perfect nature and with plenty of life. Neither the agitation of the tragic, nor the emotion of the elegiac, nor the naïve seriousness of the burlesque parts of Shakespeare's works, are obtained by our actors. To what melting power and sweetness may such scenes be raised as that in Much Ado About Nothing where Balthazar sings, and that in Twelfth-Night where the fool sings before Orsino; these compositions being for the most part from musicians of Handel's time or school, they often entwine a bond of the sweetest harmony around the great composer and our poet; but few actors on our own stage, have an idea of the tender deathlike attention which their effect can produce. But, above all, no one would condescend to act the ridiculous personages with such perfect devotion as to render evident that each of these characters is just as much or even more occupied with himself as the noblest creations of man placed near them. Each actor in such parts throws just so much irony in his acting as he thinks necessary to exhibit the superiority of his wisdom over the folly which he is to represent, and sufficient to ruin his acting, his character, and the piece.

IV. SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS.

We have reached the close of the second period of Shakespeare's writings, and have surveyed the three-fold series of plays which belong to it. An abundance of poetic reflections, and of moral ideas and truths, meet us in these works, and have at all times fascinated us; but in the manner in which *we* have considered and grouped them, they seem to bring the poet himself personally somewhat nearer to us. We cannot have failed to perceive that there was manifold harmony in the design that originated these plays, and that here and there they were penetrated by the same ethical idea, however different were the subjects. Several characters appeared to us as transcripts of the poet's mind; various opinions, truths, and situations, treated with especial emphasis, seem to remind us of the poet's own experiences. We stated before, at the commencement of this second period, that after a survey of the works belonging to it we would return to the history of Shakespeare's life, and search if possibly we might discover a spiritual thread by which to trace a connection between the poems and the poet's life. If such a relation exists, it can alone be sought for in Shakespeare's sonnets, for they are the only productions of the poet which afford us an immediate glance into his own inward life. It is, therefore, incumbent upon us, before we take a view of the further fortunes of the poet's life, to cast a glance upon this series of poems.

Shakespeare's sonnets are occasional poems, which were not originally intended for publication. The first mention of them is in Meres' 'Wits Treasury' in 1598. He designates them entirely as private poems, calling them 'Shakespeare's sugred Sonnets among his private friends,' over which 'the sweete wittie soule of Ovid' had passed. Immediately after this commendation, and it seems attracted by it, a bookseller named W. Jaggard hunted out these sonnets, and published in 1599, under the title of 'The Passionate Pilgrim,' a collection of

short miscellaneous poems, among which were some avowedly by other poets; a few sonnets out of Love's Labour's Lost were inserted; two others upon the theme of Venus and Adonis might easily have been suggested by Shakespeare's poem on this subject, and have been composed by another pen; only two sonnets of the series of 'private poems' did the piratical publisher succeed in capturing. We may conclude from this that these poems were carefully kept secret; perhaps, also, there were no other sonnets of Shakespeare than the collection which was subsequently published in a more complete form. They appeared at the same time with the supplementary poem of 'The Lover's Complaint,' 1609, under the title: 'Shakespeare's Sonnets. Never before imprinted.' A mysterious obscurity surrounds even now this manifestly legitimate edition. It has the appearance of not being published by the poet himself. Contrary to all custom, the publisher T. T. (Thomas Thorpe) wrote a dedication to them, and this indeed to an unknown individual, designated only by the initials Mr. W. H., whom he styles 'the onlie begetter of these sonnets,' and to whom he wishes 'all happinesse and that eternitie promised by our ever-living poet.'

The sonnets of Shakespeare, from the mystery in which they were veiled with respect to this 'begetter,' and from the obscurity of their whole purport, have ever been a perplexity to the interpreter and biographer; and in the only clear and distinct part of this purport, they have been a perplexity to the admirers of the poet. The first 126 sonnets in the collection are addressed to a friend; the last 28, the contents of which we have before characterised, bespeak that intercourse with a light-minded woman which was an outrage to all who wished to see no defect in the poet. But even the greater part, it was here and there believed, must be interpreted to the disadvantage of the poet. With such blind prejudice were these poems long read, that as late as Malone's time they all, even the first 126, were believed to have been addressed to a woman! And even after it had happily been ascertained that they were intended for a male friend, Chalmers came with his 'Apology for the believers in the Shakespeare papers,' in 1797, and explained that the person to whom they were addressed was Queen Elizabeth! When at length it was established (a fact at the outset impossible to be mistaken) that the sonnets were written to a young friend, the enthusiastic and amorous style awakened a severe suspicion, from which even other poets of the time

were not free. It belonged to the superabundant style of this Italian school of poetry, as it did to the complimentary character of the age, that an unmeasured expression of flattery and tenderness distinguished all writers of that day, and all clients of noble art-patrons from Naples to London. Shakespeare, in the dedication of his Lucrece to the Earl of Southampton, speaks of 'the love without end' which he devoted to him; Ben Jonson subscribes himself to Dr. Donne as his 'true lover;' Shakespeare also in his sonnets calls his favourite young friend his 'lovely boy.' This was in harmony with the style of the age, although the age itself did not always thus regard it. Barnfield, in his 'Passionate Shepherd' (1595), bewails in a series of sonnets his love for a beautiful youth; it was an innocent imitation of one of Virgil's Eclogues; but the same construction was put upon it as upon Shakespeare's sonnets. On closer consideration this revealed itself. But uncertainty still prevailed as to the youth who won from Shakespeare such extraordinarily deep affection or such shallow pompous flattery. It was of no use for interpreters to suggest that the sonnets should be regarded as if they were merely addressed to a creature of the imagination, as if they were fictions of the fancy, and as if they had been written in the name of other friends; they must indeed have had scarcely a presentiment of the nature of this realistic poet seriously to believe that he had used his pen thus dipped in his own heart's blood in the hire of another, or that he could ever with his free choice have suffered his art to depict so strange a fiction as that most strange connection delineated in these sonnets. For where the subjects are distinct, where profound reflections and feelings occupy the poet, what in all the world could have induced him to utter these emotions of his soul in the form of amorous outpourings to a friend, if such a friend were not truly and bodily at his side, sharing his inner life? We are too much accustomed to see this form of sonnet only employed in the idle play of forced fancy among spiritualistic poets. But if the Shakespeare sonnets are really to be distinguished above others, they are so only because a warm life lies within them, because actual circumstances of life appear even under the pale colouring of this form of poetry, and because the full pulsation of a deeply excited heart penetrates the thick veil of poetic formalism.

It is clear that the sonnets are addressed only to one and the same youth; even the last twenty-eight sonnets to a woman relate

from their purport to the one connection between Shakespeare and his young friend; and Regis, in his German translations of the sonnets, has justly perceived that these should properly be arranged with the sonnets 40–42. The sonnettist says himself that he is continually expressing one old love in a new form. The same caressing tone ever returns, even after it has been interrupted by more serious subjects of discussion; the 'sweet boy' is the poet's bud and rose to the last. If we must even admit, as has been often the case, that the sonnets originated at great intervals of time, the poet has himself told us why he continues even at a later period to ascribe in poetic fiction the bloom of youth to his friend; he would, he says in sonnet 108, 'like prayers divine, each day say over the very same, counting no old thing old;' his 'eternal love' weighed not 'the dust and injury of age.' To this ever-loved one Shakespeare assigns beauty, birth, learning, and riches; from the most superficial reading it is evident that he was a young man of high rank in society, whose distance from the poet rendered it necessary that their mutual relation should be concealed from the world. It was evidently on account of this outward incongruity that the sonnets, when they appeared, were neither dedicated by Shakespeare himself, nor was the name of the 'only begetter' designated by the publisher; indeed, we may admit with certainty that the initials Mr. W. H. were intended to mislead. The begetter, that is the person to whom the sonnets were addressed, was evidently not of the middle class. Collier and others, indeed, have understood by the 'begetter' only the *procurer* who collected the sonnets for the publisher, but the publisher himself in the dedication plainly designates that 'begetter' as the very man to whom Shakespeare in the sonnets promised immortality through his verse. This 'begetter' is necessarily the same man whom the 38th sonnet calls in a similar sense 'the tenth muse' and 'the argument' which never suffers the poet to want 'subject to invent;' the same man whom the 78th sonnet enjoins to be 'most proud' of the poet's works, because their 'influence is his, and born of him.'

That the man to whom the sonnets in the edition of 1609 are dedicated is therefore the man to whom they were addressed is quite indubitable. We shall scarcely guess his name, however, from the initials Mr. W. H., by which the dedication designates [redacted] they were evidently intended to deceive. They might easily been addressed to a nobleman, although the

begetter is here termed Mr.; when Collier thinks that at that time no one would have ventured thus familiarly to denominate one of the nobility, he forgets that in accordance with the contents of the sonnets, and with the nature of the connection, this misleading was undoubtedly intentional, and rested on an understanding with the noble lord. And thus the doubtful begetter might even bear a name to which the initials W. H. had no reference. If the darling of Shakespeare were, according to Drake's supposition, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, we might believe that the initials W. H. concealed and betrayed just as much of the truth as was intended by the dedication. We are not, for this reason, inclined to favour Boaden's supposition ('On the Sonnets of Shakespeare,' 1837) that they were intended for William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke. It is true that from the personal advantages, and from the position which Pembroke occupied, he might well have been the friend and patron to whom Shakespeare would have dedicated such sonnets. He was handsome enough for such praise, and great enough for such distinction; he was a protector of all learning; himself a scholar, himself a poet, he was universally beloved and respected; he was an especial patron of Shakespeare, and a friend to his dramas, as may be seen from the dedication of the edition of Shakespeare's works in 1623. But from the period and the age of the Earl of Pembroke it is not possible that the sonnets were addressed to him. He was born in 1580, consequently in the year 1598, when Meres mentions the sonnets, he was eighteen years old; and it is not imaginable that Shakespeare would have exhorted so urgently a young friend of this age to marry, as he does in the first sonnets; moreover, this would oblige us to admit that these same first sonnets were not written before 1598, though it appears probable that they were produced some years earlier. Boaden is therefore obliged to add to the one improbable supposition a second, namely, that the sonnets published in 1609 were not those mentioned by Meres! But he has here overlooked the fact that two of our sonnets were printed by Jaggard as early as 1599, and that, if these were in being, the whole series must also have been in existence, because, taken apart from the collection, they have no meaning. Amid these doubts, Collier despaired of coming to any opinion as to the hero of these sonnets. But this appears to us to limit all conjecture too much. Nathan Drake's supposition that the Earl of Southampton was Shakespeare's youthful friend, the

object of such hearty affection and reverence, rests, in spite of all opposition on the part of the English editor with his hostility to conjecture, upon such sure grounds, that we must regard all hypothesis in the light of a sin, if we do not adhere to this one. The caution of the critic does not require that we should repudiate a supposition so extraordinarily probable; it requires alone that we should not obstinately insist upon it and set it up as an established certainty, but that we should lend a willing ear to better and surer knowledge whenever it is offered.

The Earl of Southampton was born in the year 1573, and from 1590 he resided in London. His mother's second husband was the Lord Treasurer Sir Thomas Heneage, whose office brought him into connection with the theatre; this may have given his step-son opportunity of gaining a taste for the works of the stage and inclination to afford them protection. He was early a patron and a passionate friend of the drama. In a letter from Rowland White to Robert Sidney (1599) it is said: 'The Lord Southampton and Lord Rutland come not to the court; they pass away the time in London, merely in going to plays every day.' At the same time he was early the patron of all scholars; the excellent Chapman calls him in his Iliad 'the choice of all our country's noblest spirits;' Nash, in speaking of him, says: 'Incomprehensible is the height of his spirit, both in heroical resolution and matters of conceit.' Beaumont asks, who lives on England's stage and knows him not? All poets and writers vied with each other in dedicating their works to him. Taking for granted that Shakespeare addressed his sonnets to him, he says this himself in the 78th:—

> So oft have I invoked thee for my Muse
> And found such fair assistance in my verse;
> As every alien pen has got my use
> And under thee their poesy disperse.

Shakespeare himself, in 1593, dedicated to him his Venus and Adonis, in a style of humble distance; in the following year his Lucrece appeared with a bolder dedication, which speaks already of the 'love without end' which he devotes to him, on account of which the poet feels himself assured of a good reception for his little work, not from the worth of his 'untutored lines,' but from 'the warrant' which he has of the Earl's honourable disposition. We have before conjectured that these two descriptive poems of Shakespeare's, if they originated

earlier, were yet revised for publication at this time. The character of the poetry, full of conceits and epigrams, is the same as that which prevails in most of these sonnets. In the 53rd sonnet he says :—

> Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
> Is poorly imitated after you ;
> On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,
> And you in Grecian tires are painted new.

We should think this alludes directly to both poems; the first passage distinctly; the second almost more so. In Lucrece, Shakespeare has mentioned Helen in the description of a picture, and it is as if the retrospect had suggested to him the allusion 'you in Grecian tires are painted new.' The image of the coy Adonis is closely connected with the substance of the first 17 sonnets, and the stanzas 27–29 of the poem are written thoroughly in the style of these first sonnets. These are the poems in which Shakespeare earnestly advises his young friend to marry, that he may secure to the world a copy of his beauty and excellence. In this same year, 1594–5, which might easily be the date of the commencement of the sonnets, judging from the intimate connection between Southampton and Shakespeare which the dedication of Lucrece betrays, the earl paid his addresses to Elizabeth Vernon, a cousin of his friend the Earl of Essex. The queen did not desire this union, and subsequently, when in 1598 or 1599 they married without her knowledge, she ordered both to be placed in confinement; this seems indeed to indicate a position in which such an impressive admonition as that which Shakespeare repeats in those first seventeen sonnets would not be out of place. At that time Southampton was scarcely twenty-two years old, an age young enough to admit of Shakespeare's caressing expressions, 'sweet boy' and others, and advanced enough to allow of exhortations to marry. With respect to this connection between the earl and Shakespeare, a notice is preserved which, if it were fully proved, would testify the unusual nature of this union between two men of unequal birth, and this in such a manner as to explain to us the entire devotion of our poet towards the youth. Rowe relates in his life of Shakespeare, as a matter which would have been incredible to him had it not rested on the authority of Sir William Davenant, who was well acquainted with Shakespeare's affairs, that Southampton once gave Shakespeare the sum of a thousand

pounds, a sum that according to the present value of money we may estimate at five times as much, in order to enable him 'to go through with a purchase which he heard he had a mind to.' It was customary to reward dedications with gifts, but not with gifts of such importance. It was at the very time of Shakespeare's two dedications that the Blackfriars company began to build the Globe on the Bankside. In consideration of the interest which the earl took in all that concerned the stage, and in consideration also of those dedications, and of this undertaking of his favourite company, Collier considers it not improbable that Southampton might have given this sum, partly to reward Shakespeare, and partly to enable him to take a share in the new building; indeed, there are no modern English editors who do not show themselves as credulous of tradition in this money-matter as we prefer to be in other matters which throw light on the internal history of the poet's life. Moreover, it well agrees with this tradition that just at this time Shakespeare's outward circumstances assumed a better appearance, and that he could assist his father's impoverished family. At all events the connection which these relations between the two parties indicate was a most unusual one, and in those days especially was quite out of rule; both Shakespeare's personal contact with Southampton, as well as the connection to which the sonnets refer. That Shakespeare should have made several such uncommon alliances is certainly hard to believe. And it has, therefore, always appeared to me incomprehensible why in England the identity of the object of these sonnets with the Earl of Southampton should be an idea so much opposed. For if ever a supposition bordered on certainty, it is this.

It has been asserted, on the other hand, that no allusions to the occurrences of Southampton's life were contained in the sonnets. Here again it is forgotten that from the purport of the sonnets themselves, and from the nature of the connection, all that would too plainly refer to the earl must have been omitted. But we have reason to believe that these sonnets were altogether written before the Earl of Southampton had had any adventures at all. His public life began in 1597, when he made a short expedition to the Azores with the Earl of Essex. In 1601 he took part in the conspiracy of the same nobleman, his kinsman; he was thrown into prison, and was only released by the death of the queen. It is not quite impossible that

more than one allusion to the expedition to the Azores is contained in the sonnets; the whole group, from 43–61, speak abundantly of an outward separation between the two friends, which falls heavily upon the poet. But it is more probable that these passages refer to a less important absence of his friend, and that all the sonnets were written before 1597. Everything combines in giving greater certainty to this date of the sonnets than to the conjecture relating to the person of the Earl of Southampton. We have said that Meres mentions the sonnets; we feel ourselves obliged to regard it as a fact that he intended *our* sonnets, because he designates them as private poems amongst Shakespeare's friends, and because in 1599 two of the series were published, which lose their signification and import apart from the rest. The sonnets thus originated prior to 1598. As regards the question of time, the passage has been always overlooked where, in one of the later sonnets, the poet expressly says that three years had passed since first he had seen his friend. If we assume that this was in 1593, in the year of the dedication of Venus and Adonis, the latter poems must have been written before 1597, for we believe that we shall be able to prove presently that the sonnets in the first edition of 1609 are chronologically arranged according to an inner connection. Collier and others say indeed that the sonnets were written at very different periods, some in youth, some at a more advanced age, that in some the poet speaks of his 'pupil pen,' in others of his age. But this rests indeed upon the carelessness o the readers. If we were to take seriously the poet's poetical exaggerations concerning his age, they would have no sense even if the sonnets were first written in 1608; Shakespeare was then forty-four years old. But incidentally—and this also is quite overlooked—the poet speaks of his age in one of the two sonnets printed in Jaggard's collection in 1599; he was then only a few years past thirty! These allusions to his age can thus only be understood relatively, in comparison with the age of his young friend. And even then no great difference appears to exist. In the 81st sonnet he says:—

> Or I shall live your epitaph to make,
> Or you survive when I in earth am rotten.

This indicates no great difference of age; but it agrees best with the actual difference of nine years which existed between Shakespeare and Southampton. It might be regarded purely

as a poetic license, when the sonnettist launches forth upon his wrinkles and his autumn-time of life. Thus Robert Greene, in his 'Farewell to Folly,' 1591, says also that age is approaching, and he is speaking of his many years at a time when he was not much past thirty. We will, however, not call it a mere poetic freedom. For to a man active betimes, to a youth of fancy who has accomplished much in his early years, who has lived quickly and effectively, and who understands how to measure the value of time, that moment will ever be a solemn one in which he leaves the twenties, the spring-tide of his first fresh youth, and approaches the turning point of that '*mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*;' to him the first reflection upon the stealing advance of age will ever be more gloomy than to the man who strives patiently in the long routine of life's difficulties, to whom the twenties are years of privation and of care. In this first seriousness of age, in this sad retrospect at the charming youth of his beloved friend, Shakespeare might well say (sonnet 73) that for him the time had come,

> When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
> Upon these boughs which shake against the cold,
> Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

He might say this, and no one possessed of experience and fancy would marvel, even if this sigh of tenderest melancholy should come from the lips of a poet of thirty years of age. Internal evidence may be added to the outward grounds which we have advanced with regard to the exact date of the sonnets. These poems belong to the Italian period of Shakespeare's writings. They are written at the time at which all the most famous collections of sonnets by English poets appeared: Daniel's 'Delia,' 1592, from which the form of the Shakespeare sonnets is imitated; Constable's 'Diana,' 1594; Spenser's 'Amoretti,' 1595; Drayton's 'Idea's Mirror,' 1594, and others. We have seen above how about this time Shakespeare's taste began to change, how he bade adieu to the lyric forms of the south, how he drew closer to the national Saxon taste, and how the simple songs of the people henceforth supplied the lyric passages in his dramas which in Love's Labour's Lost are occupied by sonnets. The historical plays based on the national annals removed him still more from the Romanic taste. To anyone who has attentively read Shakespeare's poetry in chronological order, it will appear plainly impossible that he could have written a long series of verses of this kind after 1598.

We will now endeavour to follow the inner thread which binds together the sonnets of Shakespeare. In so doing we shall not suffer ourselves to be misled by the adversaries to this mode of explanation, some of whom must have read these poems without any attention or imagination, and who have in consequence interpreted this interpretation as if the sonnets were regarded as an originally connected whole, as a rhyming chronicle intentionally delineating a section of the poet's life. Others already have perceived before us (Armitage Brown, 'Shakespeare's Autobiographical Poems,' 1838) that these poems are divided into different groups, each of which touches on a distinct subject; but in the separation and characterisation of these groups we do not wholly coincide with Brown's views. All these groups form together a single whole, a history of the poet's inner life, following an exact psychological course full of nature and truth; the sonnets are chronologically arranged in order to unroll this course before us. What renders the distinction between these groups difficult, and may easily mislead the reader into denying a distinction at all, is the interruption of the sonnets relating to stated circumstances by some of an entirely general character, which proclaim with great uniformity the praise of the friend. These vague songs of praise are scattered throughout the whole collection, veiling the real purport of the rest, that is of the true occasional poems. The sonnets were of course written singly, and the greater part would naturally belong to those universal poems of homage which expressed the constant relation between the friends, and which, from their purport, did not belong to any fixed condition or period. The poet, in arranging them for the press, would hardly accurately observe to what time they belonged; he could not place them monotonously together; he would be obliged to distribute them among the groups which exhibit the touching history of the connection. If we do not suffer ourselves to be disturbed by the insertion of these insignificant pieces, we shall find the history of that inner life distinct and expressive. One thing more, moreover, must not mislead us; this is the form of the sonnet itself, and that which is incidental to it. This style of poetry has frequently been attacked, and it has often been defended. If we would seek for cutting weapons of attack, we may find them in Shakespeare's sonnets. What a living picture would our poet have left behind if, when prompted by his love, he had sung the union of soul with his sweet youth in the free

forms suggested by the moment and by the nature of the circumstances! But as he moulded all into this one angular form, which admits of no distinctness and which spreads a dim mist over each tangible meaning, we can readily understand how it was that for so long a time the bare actual circumstances could be misunderstood or overlooked. This one drawback is followed by another, arising equally naturally from the style. The want of reality in these indistinct poems was to be supplied by poetic brilliancy; the relation between the means and the object, between cause and effect disappears; far-fetched thoughts, strange exaggerated images, and hyperbolic phrases, mislead the understanding; profound conceits and epigrammatic fancies, sparkling for their own sake, cast the subject in question on this very account into the shade. This intensely poetic language does not prevent even the repetition of matter and expression in the same monotonous form, so that the tautology is constant. And as in Lucrece the poet involuntarily experienced surprise at the peculiarities of that conceit-style of the Marinists, here also in the midst of his work he acknowledges (sonnet 76) that his verse is 'barren of new pride, so far from variation or quick change,' that he writes 'all one, ever the same,' and keeps his 'invention in a noted weed.' In this weed it is not easy to recognise the true and real purport; tact and comparison must teach us not to accept it all too much as simple truth, and yet also not unthinkingly to lose the certain meaning.

We are of opinion, with Cunningham and others, that the sonnets of our poet, æsthetically considered, have been overestimated. With respect to their psychological tenor, they appear to us, with the total lack of all other sources for the history of Shakespeare's inner life, to be of inestimable value. They exhibit the poet to us just in the most interesting period of his mental development, when he passed from dependent to independent art, from foreign to national taste, from subserviency and distress to prosperity and happiness; aye, even from loose morality to inner reformation. And in addition to the gigantic, scarcely comprehensible picture of his mental development, which is presented to us in his dramas of this period, we here receive a small intelligible painting of his inner life, which brings us more closely to the poet himself. We live with him throughout an intercourse which was probably one of the greatest events in the calm routine of his existence;

we read the touching story of a full, feeling, and warm heart, a story that no one can contemplate without deep emotion; we perceive the gentle undulation and the stronger current of an aspiring passion ebbing and flowing, the psychological story of which we can follow in all its depth. We have before learned that Shakespeare was not happy in his married life. The void which would thus be left in his heart seemed to be entirely filled when he received the love of the noble youth, who from his high position extended his helpful hand to him in his lowliness and poverty, and perhaps first cast a higher intellectual light into an outwardly joyless existence. Truly the development of this connection of the poet with his 'fair friend' is the detail of a strong passion, violent even to suffering, such as a man generally feels only for a woman. In England no one until now has felt any sympathy in this history of the poet's heart. Great care has been taken to discover, from a hundred scattered notices, how much the poet was 'worth' at the different periods of his life, but no one with true devotion has studied these sources connected with the history of his heart. Perhaps for this a more youthful people is required, a people such as the German, whose hearts are not yet hardened by exclusive attention to politics and common interests. Nay, the whole secret of our deep interest in Shakespeare seems to rest in this—that the degree of development and culture of our nation at the present day is nearly the same as that of England in Shakespeare's time, and that advantageously for us this great poet has not come upon us unawares, as was the case with England, but that since the period of his appearance, by the nurture of poetry through two hundred years, the soil with us has been slowly and thoroughly prepared for him.

We will now pass finally to the analysis of the separate groups of our sonnet series, and following the given arrangement of the poems, we will relate the history of the connection between the two friends.

Sonnets 1–17. The first seventeen sonnets urge upon the 'tender churl' in a forcible and even importunate manner to marry; they call him 'the world's fresh ornament,' the 'only herald to the gaudy spring,' on whom it is enjoined as a duty to leave behind a new impress of the beautiful seal, carved by nature as a copy; and in this series we may admire the rich invention of images with which the poet varies a theme so simple. From the 14th sonnet the subject passes gradually

into the more general praise of the beauty and truth of his young friend; yet in sonnet 17 he says, in pursuance of his former theme,

> Who will believe my verse in time to come,
> If it were fill'd with your most high deserts?
> But were some child of yours alive that time,
> You should live twice; in it, and in my rhyme.

Nevertheless, continues sonnet 18, abandoning this theme, 'thy eternal summer shall not fade.' The praise of his friend was carried to a great height in these first sonnets; further on the poet recollects, as it were, that he will not continue in this exaggerated style; he will not imitate that Muse (Drayton) 'stirr'd by a painted beauty to his verse;' he will not take all his ornaments from heaven, from sun and moon, from 'earth and sea's rich gems,' from 'April's first-born flowers,' and from all the rare things that 'heaven's air in this huge rondure hems;' he will write truly as he loves; he will not weaken his own heart with abundance (sonnet 23); rather, 'for fear of trust,' he will 'forget to say the perfect ceremony of love's rite;' and his friend shall 'learn to read what silent love hath writ.' In fact, in the following group, the elaborate form of the first series is interrupted by the expression of the most lively sentiments, while their theme is no longer of so superficial a character as that of the earlier ones, but is drawn from the soul of the poet.

Sonnets 18–40. The subject which links together the second series is the inequality of the position of the two friends. The history of their close connection begins here, for the first seventeen sonnets might have been written from a distance. We here plainly perceive the devotion with which the young nobleman surrendered himself to the poet so superior in mind, and with which the poet returns this condescending friendship, by turns exhibiting modesty and self-confidence, reserve and familiarity. He must confess (sonnet 36) that

> we two must be twain,
> Although our undivided loves are one:
> So shall those blots that do with me remain,
> Without thy help by me be borne alone.
> In our two loves there is but one respect,
> Though in our lives a separable spite,
> Which though it alter not love's sole effect,
> Yet doth it steal sweet hours from love's delight.

He may not evermore acknowledge his friend, nor may he with public kindness honour him, lest he take from his name that

honour which he would give to his friend. 'But do not so; cries the friend-poet,

> I love thee in such sort,
> As, thou being mine, mine is thy good report.

The poet will in this manner take care of his honour. Thus subsequently he desires that his friend (sonnet 71) should not mourn for him when he is dead, but let his love decay even with his life, lest, as he says,

> The wise world should look into your moan,
> And mock you with me after I am gone.

The poet has many departed friends to deplore, but the one new friend compensates for all. Yet the sense of the cleft which separates them both torments him throughout, and his humility suffers him not to continue in his self-reliance. If in one place, elevated by the honouring friendship, he declares his readiness to resign all dignities of rank, elsewhere he longs after a more honourable position that he may be more worthy of his friend. The contentment expressed in sonnet 25, where he willingly renounces honour and title for the place where he 'may not remove, nor be removed,' is at variance with his desire elsewhere (sonnet 26) for a favourable star, which 'puts apparel on his tattered loving, to show him worthy,' that he may dare to boast how he loves his friend; till then he will not show his head where he may be proved. This double condition of feeling is expressed by the 29th sonnet in the most poetic and deeply affecting manner:—

> When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
> I all alone beweep my out-cast state,
> And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
> And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
> Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
> Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,
> Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
> With what I most enjoy contented least;
> Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
> Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
> Like to the lark at break of day arising
> From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
> For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings,
> That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Sonnets 40–42. The three following sonnets, in which the poet complains of the robbery of his love, have been already

anticipated by sonnets 33–35; in the former group the connection is introduced and defended in a roundabout way, which the poet himself designates as a fault. The sonnets 40–42 gently reproach the young friend for his robbery of a beloved one, for whom, according to the whole tone, the poet cares but little; whom his friend on his side also, as it seems, despises, and apparently withdraws from only in wanton raillery. The sonnets 133 and 134 make it clear that the same woman is here intended as the one to whom the last group of sonnets, previously discussed, was addressed. This group ought to have been introduced here as an episode, although it was certainly expedient to remove it, in order not to interrupt the development of the connection between the two friends. The wantonness which is alluded to indicates, in a new and no very edifying manner, how closely the two friends were now united. The rich man takes from the poor friend his one lamb, blemished as it might be; he forgives it in his compliant position, he finds that in the 'lascivious grace' of the youth, 'all ill well shows,' and that these 'pretty wrongs' befit his years, which are ever exposed to temptation.

Sonnets 43–61. The following series, as far as the 61st sonnet, were written during the absence of his young friend; they were temporarily separated; a 'sad interim' is bewailed, though it does not 'kill the spirit of love with a perpetual dulness.' Even when the single poems do not speak plainly of this theme, they yet have reference to it. It is begun in sonnets 43–45; in sonnet 46 it seems to be lost sight of, but the 47th sonnet refers both poems again to the principal theme. Thus subsequently the sonnets 53–55 appear to deviate, but the 56th sonnet unites the little series again to the main subject, the absence of the friend. The whole tone of these poems expresses longing after the absent one; the friendship is strangely mingled with a jealousy which throughout gives it a painful sting; it is as if the poet strove more earnestly in the separation to preserve the favour of his friend. How natural is it that just in this time of absence the thought should torment him, whether the man of high position, accustomed from early youth to the happy principles of equality, might not some day wholly alienate himself from him. In this presentiment of a bare possibility, a timid half-expressed self-reliance on his own desert struggles with the devotion of the moment while he

yet possesses his friend. The 49th sonnet is in this respect full of expression :—

> Against that time, if ever that time come,
> When I shall see thee frown on my defects,
> When as thy love hath cast his utmost sum,
> Call'd to that audit by advised respects;
> Against that time, when thou shalt strangely pass
> And scarcely greet me with that sun, thine eye;
> When love, converted from the thing it was,
> Shall reasons find of settled gravity;
> Against that time do I ensconce me here
> Within the knowledge of mine own desert,
> And this my hand against myself uprear,
> To guard the lawful reasons on thy part:
> To leave poor me thou hast the strength of laws,
> Since why to love I can allege no cause.

Sonnets 62–77. The serious mood, which has before overcome the poet, gains still more ground. The formerly often playful tone ceases; another period begins; events seem to lie between this and the earlier parts. The poet speaks much and often of his age, thoughts of decay and of the frailty of all things occupy his mind, and the glance he casts upon the eternity of his poetry seems but little to divert him. In sonnet 73, the presentiment of an early death appears; even the idea of his favourite's future age now torments him. A longing after death seizes him when he looks upon the evils of society generally, or upon those more closely connected with himself—evils that abound in the republic of letters. A disgust, which he often expresses in his dramas, takes possession of him when he observes the falsehood of the world, borrowing beauty from paint and plaited hair; the vitiated age, when beauty no longer 'lived and died as flowers do now,' when

> the golden tresses of the dead,
> The right of sepulchres, were shorn away,
> To live a second life on second head.

As years advance he sees this abhorred world entered by his young friend, whom for a delicious moment he had alone possessed; he sees him fallen into bad company; they slander the beauty of his mind according to the outward appearance; to his fair flower they add 'the rank smell of weeds.' Whilst he protects him from every suspicion, he blames him gently, because this contradiction between his true desert and its 'show' is his own fault, as he does 'common grow.' The dawning

jealousy of the favourite, whom now other society also claims, conceals itself under the veil of moral carefulness. It lies in the nature of this passion, that where it once has taken root it is difficult to eradicate it. It binds the poet more and more within its fetters; we may observe the finest marks of its increase and indication in our poetic documents. He writes in sonnet 70:—

> Slander's mark was ever yet the fair.
> So thou be good, slander doth but approve
> Thy worth the greater, being woo'd of time.
> For canker vice the sweetest buds doth love,
> And thou present'st a pure unstained prime.
> Thou hast pass'd by the ambush of young days,
> Either not assail'd or victor being charged.

This praise, in which may lie so many reasons for delight, should be read in connection with the remaining poems, in order that we may feel the painful tone in which it is uttered. And with this we must also compare the joyful wantonness with which, in the former untroubled days, the most opposite reproaches had been made! Here he says so sadly that his friend is 'not assailed' or not won, and before he spoke so playfully in those favourite lines which we have already read in Titus and Henry VI.:—

> Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won,
> Beauteous thou art, therefore to be assail'd.

Here how discontented: 'he has passed the ambush;' there, so contented: 'temptation follows him, and the pretty wrongs befit him well.' A greater austerity, it must be admitted, appears in these later sonnets, and in such a manner as allows us to infer a change of mind in the poet; yet we hear in them still more plainly the voice of jealousy, which grudges to the world and its judgment both his friend's virtues and faults. Now he wishes that the world could once see his pleasure, and then he counts it best to be alone with his friend; now he is 'proud as an enjoyer,' and anon doubting 'the filching age will steal his treasure.' We feel throughout that the social relations of the young nobleman change and expand, that he steps beyond the exclusive possession of the poet. The way is prepared for the following group, in which the noble patron of art appears more decidedly surrounded by other poets and literary clients.

Sonnets 78–86. There was a time when our poet alone called upon the aid of the kind patron, and when his verse

alone 'had all his gentle grace;' but now he laments that his 'gracious numbers are decayed,' and that his 'sick muse doth give another place.' Alien pens had got his use, and under his patron's name dispersed their poesy. He grants that his friend was never 'married to his muse,' but it grieves him. He ventures not to reproach his friend that he should receive the 'dedicated words' of other writers, especially when he finds his worth 'a limit past' the praise our poet had bestowed upon him, and therefore 'enforced to seek anew some fresher stamp of the time-bettering days.' Yet he commends to him his simple, 'true, plain words,' which would retain their value by the side of the strained rhetoric of the other. Nay, he arms himself with his proudest self-reliance, and tells his friend,

> Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
> Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read;
> And tongues to be your being shall rehearse
> When all the breathers of this world are dead.

But this self-reliance endures not the jealous emotions in the poet's heart; there is no passion which so completely casts down proud self-confidence as a jealousy not entirely hopeless, and springing from true love. As he says in the 80th sonnet,

> O, how I faint when I of you do write,
> Knowing a *better spirit* doth use your name,
> And in the praise thereof spends all his might,
> To make me tongue-tied, speaking of your fame!

The modest man, as if he must still hold in honour the choice of his friend, painful as it is to him, calls himself 'a worthless boat' compared to the proud, 'tall building' of the new favourite. And who *was* Drayton, whom some imagine to have been this favoured one, or indeed Dee, whom others find in him! And yet it cast him down to see the approbation of his beloved bestowed upon another, and he 'inhearsed' his ripe thoughts in his brain, 'making their tomb the womb wherein they grew.' His self-reliance whispers to him yet again that he has nothing to fear from the proud full sail of his adversary, nor in 'that affable familiar ghost, which nightly gulls him with intelligence;' fear of him makes him neither dumb nor sick, only when his friend's favour prospered the verse of his rival, then lacked he matter, and his own verse became enfeebled.

Sonnet 87–95. That feeling of estrangement, which in this increasing jealousy we have seen taking possession of the

poet's heart, appears consummated in the next epoch of the development of this union of the friends, and is coupled with the deepest, most touching grief. Still the value of this love stands to him high above everything, but the fear that his darling may suddenly wholly withdraw from him has grown to a certainty. The remembrance of the difference of his friend's rank rises again in the poet's soul with a bitter warning. Once, when he had described this union with his friend, it had been with joyful confidence, even when concealed under elegiac laments; now it is with tragic despondency. He had once expressed (sonnet 49) that he had no ground, no right, no claim upon his love, but he did this so calmly, because himself incredulous; he had exhibited only as a poetic fancy the case which now is at hand as a reality. Notwithstanding, he is so kind, so ready for resignation, that he permits his friend to add to his self-known unworthiness even invented faults, which can justify him in forsaking him. As soon as he knows his will, he will 'acquaintance strangle, and look strange,' he will be absent from his walks, and will banish from his tongue his sweet beloved name: 'lest he (too much profane) should do it wrong, and haply of their old acquaintance tell.' In the 87th sonnet he writes him as it were a parting letter:—

> Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing,
> And like enough thou know'st thy estimate:
> The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;
> My bonds in thee are all determinate.
> For how do I hold thee but by thy granting?
> And for that riches where is my deserving?
> The cause of this fair gift in me is wanting,
> And so my patent back again is swerving.
> Thyself thou gavest, thy own worth then not knowing,
> Or me, to whom thou gavest it, else mistaking;
> So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,
> Comes home again, on better judgment making.
> Thus have I had thee, as a dream doth flatter,
> In sleep a king, but waking, no such matter.

However resolute this letter of renunciation sounds, it was not so seriously intended. The strength of fidelity or the weakness of love leads him ever back again to the object, who rises above the power of his resignation and stifles every feeling of self-reliance. He wallows deeper in the painful thoughts of this separation, and tears his wounds wider and wider asunder, nevertheless without being able to bleed to death. Misfortunes,

too, meet him from without; he complains of the 'spite of fortune.' 'Hate me when thou wilt,' he writes in the 90th sonnet,

> if ever, now;
> Now, while the world is bent my deeds to cross,
> Join with the spite of fortune, make me bow,
> And do not drop in for an after-loss:
> Ah, do not, when my heart hath 'scaped *this* sorrow,
> Come in the rearward of a conquer'd woe;
> Give not a windy night a rainy morrow,
> To linger out a purposed overthrow.
> If thou wilt leave me, do not leave me last,
> When other petty griefs have done their spite,
> But in the onset come: so shall I taste
> At first the very worst of fortune's might.

Even this degree of pain at wounded affection and self-love is not the worst. He fears even that his love may be false, and he, the lover, know it not. His looks may be with him, his heart in another place. He seems in sonnet 94 to doubt whether he shall reckon him among those dangerous superior natures 'that do not do the thing they most do show,' who misuse the privilege they possess to cover every blot with beauty's veil; who are lords and owners of their faces; who move others, while they are themselves as stone, unmoved, cold, and slow to temptation. He fears that he might have lavished his heart laden with rich treasure upon cold superficial vanity, and no more painful experience could have befallen the man who had staked so much pure love and fidelity upon this one friend.

Sonnets 100–126. But a happier destiny spared our poet this bitter experience. It had certainly come to this—that a neglect on the part of the noble friend was followed by a corresponding neglect on the part of the poet; that a cooling of the first love, an estrangement between the two had arisen; that a shadow had fallen on the union which had begun with so much promise. But these shadows dispersed, and the equal fault of both counterbalanced and neutralised each other. The 120th sonnet clearly sets forth the circumstances which the whole of the last group allows us to conjecture. It 'befriends' the poet that his friend was once unkind; for now, when the sky is again serene above them, every word in this last series of sonnets proclaims that their union now for the first time stands above the reach of caprice, that full contentment has returned, that

> ruined love, when it is built anew,
> Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater.

The poet now accuses himself, that he had alienated himself from his friend, that he had neglected his 'dear purchased right,' and had for a time slumbered in his love. He looks back upon the three years past, when their love was new, and he celebrated its spring:—

> Then I was wont to greet it with my lays,
> As Philomel in summer's front doth sing
> And stops her pipe in growth of riper days:
> Not that the summer is less pleasant now
> Than when her mournful hymns did hush the night,
> But that wild music burdens every bough
> And sweets grown common lose their dear delight.
> Therefore like her I sometime hold my tongue,
> Because I would not dull you with my song.

His silence and his absence thus began with that song of the new favourite's, with the divided favour of his friend, with the jealousy which disburdened itself in those outbursts of inward pain, when the poet looked backward to the old times, and forward to the day when he should see his darling completely separated from him. He now pathetically calls upon his muse to begin anew the interrupted song, to celebrate again the old idolatrous worship of his love, to survey the sweet face of his friend, 'if time have any wrinkles graven there.' He finds that he has 'by waning grown,' and seems to hold in his power 'time's fickle glass, his sickle.' His song goes on with the old praise upon the excellence of his friend, and extols the poet's love as 'strengthened, though more weak in seeming.' He triumphs that neither his own fears, nor the prophetic soul of the wide world, could control the lease of his true love. The moon has endured her eclipse, the sad augurs mock their own presage, and peace proclaims olives of endless age; with the drops of this most balmy time his love looks fresh. The poet acknowledges anew the moral errors to which he was exposed, but he asserts 'by all above,' that these 'blenches gave his heart another youth.' Once more he casts a glance upon the stigma 'which vulgar scandal stamped upon his brow,' but he feels now for ever assured that his friend's love and pity will efface the impression. Even this last matter which depressed him he seems to cast aside with lighter heart, in new confidence in the duration of their friendship. 'What care I,' he says in the 112th sonnet,

> who calls me well or ill,
> So you o'ergreen my bad, my good allow?

You are my all-the-world, and I must strive
To know my shames and praises from your tongue;
None else to me, nor I to none alive,
That my steel'd sense or changes, right or wrong.
In so profound abysm I throw all care
Of others' voices, that my adder's sense
To critic and to flatterer stopped are.

This, then, is the history of the origin and growth of this union of soul as we read it in Shakespeare's sonnets. It is a connection in itself of no great importance; nay, in the way in which it is poetically expressed, it is not without distortion. But it testifies to a strength of feeling and passion in our poet, to a childlike nature and a candid mind, to a simple ingenuousness, to a perfect inability to veil his thoughts or to dissemble, to an innate capacity for allowing circumstances to act upon his mind in all their force and for re-acting upon them —in a word, it testifies to a nature as truthful, genuine, and straightforward as we imagine the poet from his dramatic works to have possessed. The sonnets represent the psychologically connected and undivided course of an occurrence of his inner life, which could not easily extend over a space of three years; the internal evidence upon the matter speaks thus for the complete accomplishment of the whole series within the time admitted by us. For the more accurate characterisation of the youth of whom they treat, we learn little or nothing in the whole series of poems. The bad form of the sonnet prevents us indeed from gleaning much from these poems as to the nature of his friend; and, moreover, at the age which we imagine the young man to have reached, the character is first established and formed. If we once again admit the conjecture advanced, that Shakespeare's favourite was the Earl of Southampton, the few traits of which we can lay hold are in strict accordance. It is well known that the Earl was a man of fine powers of mind, eagerly excited in the young art of that inquisitive age, as the sonnets so appropriately designate it, and that he was a patron of all poets and scholars. That he was a man of refined manners, of a liberal nature—capable of surmounting class prejudice in a manner unusual at that time, and of extending his hand, heedless of his position, to an amiable man like Shakespeare—we know partly from his avowed connection with Shakespeare, and partly from what we can gather from touches in the history of his life. He possessed a free independent disposition and defiant self-will, little in harmony with the

absolute age of Elizabeth and James; he had married Eliza Vernon against the will of the queen; in 1601, he was involved in the conspiracy of the Earl of Essex, a frivolous and bold undertaking, testifying to the infatuated self-confidence of its instigator. He was known to be in other instances also of fiery temperament and ready for dispute; even under James, both in parliament and in privy council, he was on the side of the opposition, popular, and averse to all feeble-hearted policy. Such probably we imagine would be the qualifications of the man, and such the natural endowments of one who from his earliest youth could win so great an affection from Shakespeare.

In the foregoing analysis of the sonnets we have only advanced that which concerns the connection between the two friends. Still more important is the light thrown by them upon the circumstances and inward life of Shakespeare himself. We find our poet, however elegiac is the colouring of his mind in the sonnets, in the fresh bloom of prosperity. In the years 1593–1594, his narrative poems first gained for him notice in the best circles of society; they ranked him among the learned, and the name of Southampton, to whom they were dedicated, was their protection and recommendation. Thomas Nash would have anticipated a greater poet in Shakespeare had he continued to write in the Italian style, and relinquished his dramatic vocation. Richard Barnfield, in his 'Encomion of Lady Pecunia' (1598), places the poet 'in Fame's immortal book,' on account of his honey-flowing vein in Venus and Lucrece, without any mention of his plays; whilst at the same time Meres applies to these poems, and to his dramas equally, Horace's *exegi monumentum*. This acknowledged praise may well explain the happy self-reliance of the poet expressed in the sonnets. Throughout it is moderated by genuine modesty; he calls his lines poor and rude compared to the products of the advancing age and of rapidly progressing poetry; he considers them nothing worth and 'doing him disgrace;' but throughout these paroxysms of self-dissatisfaction we perceive the confidence with which he so often reminds his friend that the earth can yield him but a common grave, while he shall lie 'entombed in men's eyes.' This happy state of things, which we detect in his inward feelings, we find also in his outward relations at this time; and if we may credit the report of Southampton's munificent gift, this state was also suddenly determined by the favour of this

friend. Shakespeare's father had in 1578, in a time of need, mortgaged the landed property of his wife, called Ashbies, to Edmund Lambert for 40*l*; it was a small estate of sixty-five acres of land, which was well worth three times that sum. The mortgager was again to be put in possession, if on or before Michaelmas-day, 1580, the money borrowed was repaid. This took place; but the estate was withheld under the pretext that other debts owed by the old Shakespeare to Lambert must be first discharged. The Lamberts had large connections; the old Shakespeare on the contrary speaks of himself in his bill of complaint, in 1597, as 'of small wealth and very few friends and alliance.' It was in this year that he first ventured to complain, as now for the first time he seems to have had the means of supporting his cause. Similar slight notices occur several times as the prosperity of the family rose. At the period of the great dearth of 1597, there is a register of the corn then in the town of Stratford; in the list John Shakespeare is not mentioned at all, probably because he lived in the house of his son, who gladly laid out his wealth in his paternal city; William Shakespeare is registered for 10 quarters, comparatively a large quantity. In the year 1598 Shakespeare possesses one of the best houses in the best part of Stratford, known as 'the great house' or 'New Place.' In the years 1601–1603 we know that he bought three different pieces of land in his paternal city, and in 1605 he made his largest known gain in the purchase of the unexpired term of a long lease of the great and small tithes in Stratford, Old Stratford, Bishopton, and Welcom, for 440*l*. in cash. From 1597 we find him continually occupied in this manner in financial and economical affairs, which testify to an increasing prosperity. Collier finally reckons his income at 400*l*. a year. In the diary of Mr. John Ward, of Stratford, whose memoranda extend from 1648 to 1679, it is even stated that he had heard that Shakespeare in his elder days spent at the rate of 1000*l*. a year—a proof at least that he had the reputation of being a very rich man.

In the first intoxication of his youthful success, Shakespeare, it appears, continued the dissolute life in which he had indulged at Stratford. His connection with that vicious yet attractive woman exhibits him to us as a prey to a common passion. The poet finds his friend surrounded by dangerous company; he winks at first at his youthful errors, because he knows there is good in him at the core; yet he subsequently fears the pressure

of repeated temptation. He fears that slander may deaden the sensibility to reputation, he reproves the too great affability and condescension of his favourite. And while the poet blames the youthful manners of his friend, he also looks back reprovingly upon his own past conduct. He acknowledges concealed faults, wherein he is attainted; he speaks of self-love as 'grounded inward' in his heart, and of affection as an 'old offence;' he accuses himself of a 'bewailed guilt,' which may do shame to his friend; if this friend ever should find cause to slight him, he will on his side 'ensconce' himself within the knowledge of his own desert, and uprear his hand against himself. We know not what definite guilt it was which thus pressed heavily upon Shakespeare, and which he had to bewail, yet we do know enough from his life to be able at all events to refer to this expression; and it serves to animate the picture which we like to form of the poet, if we can rely upon any tangible evidence, with full readiness to relinquish it again upon better information. But that which depressed the poet far more than his actions was his rank; indeed, it is conceivable that the faults and defects which he sees attached to himself were for the most part only those undeserved ones which the age linked to the position of an actor; possibly indeed even those which were deserved were such as life in this position and the continual allurement of fancy only too readily induced. Nothing is more touching than the sight of a mind so great, standing superior as it does to the prejudices of *all* ages, and yet almost succumbing under the weight of this depressing popular feeling. In sonnet 111, he writes to the friendly nobleman:—

> O! for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
> The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
> That did not better for my life provide
> Than public means, which public manners breeds.
> Thence comes it that my name receives a brand;
> And almost thence my nature is subdued
> To what it works in, like the dyer's hand:
> Pity me then, and wish *I were renew'd;*
> Whilst, like a willing patient, I will drink
> Potions of eysel 'gainst my strong infection,
> No bitterness that I will bitter think,
> Nor double penance, to correct correction.

The metamorphosis after which the poet sighs, the *renovation* of his being, we seem to perceive taking place from a few inti-

mations, especially in the last group of our sonnets. The renewal after which he aspired may be understood and interpreted in different ways. In his outward career it is very remarkable that, at the period of the origin of these sonnets, we first find Shakespeare endeavouring to raise himself above his position, to enter the rank of the gentry, and to advance in consideration and esteem by increasing his worldly possessions. The great man evidently did not escape this weakness any more than his colleague Alleyn, who even aspired to nobility. The history of the step which he took for this purpose is strange enough. It had been affirmed, long ago, that John Shakespeare, William's father, had received permission to bear a coat of arms; but no such patent exists. There is indeed a confirmation of such a right in 1596, but very probably this was solicited by our poet himself, and not by his father. This document mentions that the heralds had been 'by credible report informed' that 'the parents and late antecessors' of John Shakespeare had been advanced and rewarded for their services to Henry VII., no trace of which, however, is to be found in the archives of the period; unless this statement refer to the Ardens, who were certainly the 'antecessors' of William Shakespeare, but not of John, and who certainly received favour and promotion from Henry VII. In 1599 an exemplification of arms was procured, in which it was stated that the 'great grandfather' of John Shakespeare had been rewarded with lands and tenements by Henry VII.; this was the case with William's great grandfather by his mother's side, but not with John's. The poet-actor, who from his profession could not have claimed a grant of arms, put forward his father's name, as having been bailiff and 'justice of the peace,' and coupled that fact with the deserts of his own maternal ancestors. It is an authentic fact that Sir William Dethick, who was Garter-king-at-arms in 1596 and 1599, was called to account for having forged pedigrees and granted coats to persons whose circumstances and station in society gave them no right to the distinction; the case of John Shakespeare was expressly charged against him. The artifices which Shakespeare employed in taking this step sufficiently show of what importance the matter was to him. However, all these measures for the elevation of his outward rank seem to receive their true light only from the determination with which Shakespeare strove as early as possible to escape from his position as an actor. It appears beyond a doubt that soon after the accession of King James to

the throne in 1603, at which period he acted in Ben Jonson's 'Sejanus,' he completely retired from the stage, and lived, first in London and subsequently at Stratford, as a dramatic poet only. No one will surely blame Shakespeare for this step. For we must remember how far the contempt of this position extended, and how absolute was the magisterial power against it, in order to understand the impatience with which a free spirit could submit to this oppression, however great the enthusiasm for the art and the liberty of the stage. In 1581 Elizabeth, in spite of all her royal favour towards the stage, had given authority to Tylney, the master of the revels, to compel into her service at their pleasure the actors and dramatic poets of every company, or to cast them into prison! To see art thus 'made tongue-tied by authority,' and 'strength by limping sway disabled,' drew those life-weary sighs from the poet in his sonnets, even in his prime. Who could blame him that he felt the ignominy of such a condition beyond others, when once, by his intercourse with his patron, he had gone hand in hand with honour and respect, which seemed spotless in the eyes of the world? If at the present day of class-levelling, disregarding the custom of other ages, we are inclined to look unjustly upon the steps that Shakespeare took to raise himself outwardly above his position, we may with all the greater satisfaction linger upon the strength of mind with which he strove to soar beyond the reach of prejudice. That this was for him an actual, great, inner struggle, is not so easily comprehended by us from the nature of the age in which we live; nevertheless, it is a fact undoubtedly confirmed by his impressive treatment of the questions upon the prejudices of position and birth which we have observed in the dramas of this period, and by what we have just read in the sonnets. In these poems, whenever the poet dwells upon the difference of rank between the two friends, and especially upon his own social position, the prevailing tone is resignation, a humble feeling of unworthiness and of degradation, a readiness to renounce, to bear alone the dishonour of his profession and the stains which were attached to it, and to yield his right to his noble friend, of knowing him no more, or of disowning him. Only occasionally does the poet rise to that self-reliance which makes him disregard this prejudice, the oppressive existence of which was hourly felt by him, and to overcome which therefore demanded no little power. And truly in those passages, and throughout in elevated poetic language, the elevating strength

of the inner resolve lies excellently expressed. Attention has already been drawn to them—to those passages in which, rousing himself from the thoughts of self-contempt, he draws such joyfulness from the remembrance of his friend as to 'scorn to change his state with kings.' And those others in which, seeing in his friend his whole world, he disregards the fame of others, and throws all care of others' voices into the profoundest abysm. But with this self-reliance with regard to his social position, a still more thorough renewal appears to have been linked. In the most different passages of the later sonnets, where a more serious mood has seized him, he glances upon his past conduct with the severity of fresh austerity; he holds before his eyes a mirror, in which he reads an unworthiness not depending upon his position; and he exonerates himself from it, if we may believe the most solemn words of such a truthful man, by the prejudice that a moral stain must of necessity cling to his position. In the 110th sonnet he says:—

> Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there,
> And made myself a motley to the view,
> Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
> Made old offences of affections new.
> Most true it is that I have look'd on truth
> Askance and strangely; but, by all above,
> These blenches gave my heart another youth.

Is it not as if Prince Henry were looking back upon his wild days, which were to him a time of trial, blunting the growth of strong passion? We Germans, in the lives of our own Goethe and Schiller, can point out the fruitful periods in which these men, so highly gifted and equally endowed for evil, after having been carried away by youthful affections and excesses, recovered again the germs of good within them, and returned to the seriousness of life and to the dignity of morality; and we may also believe that in Shakespeare there was a similar metamorphosis of moral purification and transformation, which in a man so richly gifted is perhaps a necessity greater than we imagine—a stage of development and progress to be observed in all striving and deeply impassioned natures.

Not unfrequently the conjecture has been expressed that Shakespeare conferred upon Prince Henry many essential qualities of his own nature. If this were decided, we should have a sure and tangible point of connection, uniting his life with his poetry, and proving between the two the most intimate

relation, which would afford us a definite idea of the character and intellectual stature of our poet; and it would be a point of connection of such an important kind that it would at once spare us any further search after separate scattered relations between Shakespeare's life and writings. If we perceive the fervour, love, and depth with which the poet planned and executed the character of Prince Henry, we shall be inclined even upon this one ground to consider this conjecture at any rate more narrowly. But we know enough from Shakespeare's life, and we have besides in his writings abundant points of comparison which afford no little justification for this supposition. He, too, had been carried away in his life with wild and unrestrained companions; he had felt uncomfortable at home from an unhappy marriage; he followed a degraded profession, degrading even in his own opinion; he looked back repentantly, as we have seen above, upon the faults of an impassioned nature, and struggled to shake them off. We should readily believe of the poet of the Venus and of that last series of sonnets, even without the slight intimations of biographical documents, that for a long while he had wandered in the mazes of love. But if in the sonnets we have observed the affectionate nature, which in connection with his young friend passed so deeply and thoughtfully through that trifling but pure inner life, insignificant as it might be, we shall understand further that the same poet rose to the praiseworthy glorification of the passion of love in Romeo and Juliet; aye, that he found precedents within for the sources of that jealousy of an outcast which he subsequently depicted in Othello with such fearful truth. We see from these poems, as well as from the circumstances of life indicated by the sonnets, a nature in which so great was the fermentation of passion that purification was inevitable. If the poet speaks the truth to us in this passage quoted, that 'the blenches gave his heart another youth,' then his own sentence applies to himself: 'best men are moulded out of faults; and for the most, become much more the better for being a little bad;' thus he has himself, like his Prince Henry, given proof that that is a fruitful field in which, while untilled, the weeds grow most luxuriantly, and that

> Wholesome berries thrive and ripen best,
> Neighbour'd by fruit of baser quality.

This inner purification, according to the sonnets, derived its impetus from intercourse with his noble friend. As his Prince

Henry in a higher sphere of life descended to nature and plain simplicity, so he, in his lower outcast existence, aspired to nobler habits and to a more honourable position; by opposite means he arrived at the knowledge of the higher and lower strata of society, weighed their worth, and drew in their advantages, and attained to that full, complete view of human nature which we admire in the poet, and which he has imparted to his Prince Henry. If the friendship with that noble youth existed as closely and ardently as we assume, and was cemented at the period in which Shakespeare dedicated his Lucrece to the Earl of Southampton in 1594, we understand all the better why the poet at this very time wrote that poem of friendship, the Merchant of Venice; and we call to mind that it was about the same sum lent by the princely merchant to the adventurer Bassanio for his prosperous journey that Southampton gave our poet for his share in the Globe, and for *his* expedition to the Golden Fleece. If the poet, so inferior in birth, felt himself indeed so blessed, as the sonnets tell us, in that friendship, in which his intellectual worth balanced the inequality of outward position, we understand all the better why also at this very time he wrote the history of that poor Helena, and why with so much emphasis he depicts the circumstances, when

> The mightiest space in fortune nature brings
> To join like likes, and kiss like native things.

We understand now, also, why the common idea of so many of his plays of this period lay in the ever-repeated precept that true nobility was alone that of virtue and merit, and why the spirit of all the Shakespearian poetry of this period expressed so forcibly an aversion to all show, to all glitter, and false ornament. All the thousand reflections upon the character and worth of men, upon real merit and imaginary nobility, may be referred, we see, to the one great emotion which engrossed Shakespeare at this period, to that connection with his friend and to his variance with his position, to that remarkable inner conflict in which he strove to overcome the prejudices of the world. We have seen that it *was* a severe conflict within him, which he endured not passively with cold heroism, but in which he rather sustained defeat in hours of weakness; we understand, therefore, that for years his soul was agitated by it, and that this conflict thus profoundly expressed itself in his writings of this period. If, turning from this profound vocation of his

poetry to contrast show and reality, we refer again to the characteristics of his life, we understand better why the poet was so deeply averse to his position as an actor, and finally renounced it, for this art makes show its very business. Taking all together, we think we perceive a certain necessity that the poet's greatest designs at the period of these inward emotions should have culminated in such creations as the Merchant of Venice and in such a character as Prince Henry. For how readily must he have mirrored himself in a being whom he placed at that highest point at which a man is able to cast from him that last prejudice—that, namely, of minding prejudice more than is necessary; of not caring for the appearance of evil when he is conscious of a good object; of not striving after the appearance of good when the good deed is accomplished; and of being satisfied with the self-consciousness that needs not outward praise and recompense, and cares not for outward blame and injury.

Well may we, therefore, believe that in the most essential respects the character of our poet was reflected in Prince Henry; that he perceived in the meagre outlines of the Chronicle a frame in which he could insert the picture of his own nature. A strong evidence of this we certainly cannot give; but there is one consideration which is of more weight in this respect than all written documents. A character of this simple and admirable kind, and of a nobility so noiseless and so deeply seated, could only be depicted by the poet from the experiences of his own life and being. The traits of hypocrisy and frivolity, of warlike ambition and thirst for glory, of avarice and of extravagance, the furrows which the sharp ploughshare of love or jealousy makes in the heart, these a clever and experienced man can gather from the men around him, even if in his own nature he knows but little of them. But that quiet virtue of extreme humility, the resignation of self-consciousness, the contempt of show, these are qualities which are seldom presumed in other men, and are with difficulty fathomed to their source in such a manner as in Henry IV., unless the observer himself possesses a measure of the rare virtue, and knows its traits from acquaintance with his own soul. From Shakespeare's life and writings we can easily gather some such traits, which afford a parallel between him and the prince; but it is far more important for this parallel, if we compare the nature of this his favourite with the impression produced by his works which delineate his own character

in bold outline. All that most strikingly characterises these works and their origin may be referred to the same fundamental principle upon which he formed the nature of his prince. His art as well as his moral wisdom breathes throughout the same unvarnished truth as that with which he invested his hero; the same contempt of all traditionary rules, conscious that without rules he could hit the measure of the beautiful and the good; the same principle of comprehending life in all its completeness and in all its varieties. In Shakespeare's nature, as in Henry's, all that can be called show, gloss, or false ostentation is, as if intentionally, cast aside; and as to the eye of the ordinary reader the royal Henry withdrew unnoticed and unattractively into his modest retirement, so for centuries after Shakespeare did the jewel in his works lie hidden. Deceived by the appearance of disorder, barbarisms were perceived where the highest art had been employed, and coarse morality was seen where the purest nobility of mind and tried wisdom taught the severest laws of moral life. Void of splendour as was the immediate influence of Shakespeare's splendid works, was their entrance also to the world. When Shakespeare disdained to make himself longer 'a motley to the view,' when he withdrew from the stage to his poetry, this also was an involuntary step, in harmony with the profound bias of his nature from show to reality. Previous to him, we may say, the poet was in the pay of the actor; the kernel of the art was not freed from the shell; but since Shakespeare gave to dramatic poetry an independent value, the perishable dramatic art became subject to the poetic, and form was vanquished in the service of mind. But for this he placed no more value upon his works than the least of those who composed dramas before and with him; he cared little for their printing, not at all for their collection and for their pure and genuine form. Modest and silent he gave this great bequest to the much agitated and distracted age; and as his own Prince Henry turned from his deeds of glory, he passed away from his works careless of fame. Yet to a still higher degree do we perceive that inmost characteristic of the poet, in obedience to which he pressed in all things after truth and pure nature, if we look at the relation in which his poetry stands to actual life, in comparison with the poetry of other ages and nations. Antiquity, in happy completeness of life, knew not of the contrast between nature and conventionality; the Middle Ages, with their extravagance of spirit, first produced the deviation of life

from the source of simple naturalness. The whole poetry of the age of chivalry was in unerring harmony with the conventional forms of the life of the period. The epos too of the Italians, and the drama of the French and Spanish, went hand in hand with it. But Teutonic art did not set before itself so simple a task. It did not receive life in so orthodox a belief as it found it; excited by the spirit of Protestantism, it established itself in opposition to custom, when it had become an abuse of habit; the ideal lies in it, not as in southern art in refined forms, but in a retrospective glance at an original purity of life, and in the endeavour to give back to human relations and circumstances that truth and nature which had been lost amid the arbitrary rules of conventionality. This opposition between ideal art and real life Shakespeare was the first in the Teutonic nations to denounce. His predecessors began it, but they fell into the opposite extreme of the coarsest nature; *he*, however, moderated this opposition with wise restraint; and by his influence the German poetry of the last century attained the position in which it speedily proved itself so active.

THIRD PERIOD OF SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMATIC POETRY.

We have been able to become acquainted with our poet, at least in isolated features of his life, during the first and second periods of his poetical career. In the second some precious documents have been given us, which allow us to cast a glance upon the history of his soul. Of the third epoch of his life we know scarcely anything. We learn from time to time something of his financial affairs and circumstances, of purchasing and selling, which exhibit him constantly as a man of wealth and comfort. The most important public events which occurred in this latter period of his life were the death of Elizabeth, the accession of James I., and the consequent union of the three kingdoms. Shakespeare celebrated these changes in his Macbeth (1605); in which, besides the skilful interweaving of the Stuarts, and the patriotic salutation to the first king who carried 'two-fold balls and treble sceptres,' a flattering reference to the Scottish dynasty was implied in the subject itself. Schlegel justly compares the ingenious and at the same time artistically independent manner in which this drama is formed into an occasional poem with Sophocles' praise of Athens and Æschylus' glorification of the Areopagus in the Eumenides. Shakespeare celebrates in Macbeth an ancient debt on the part of Scotland to England, whose assistance at that time freed the Scottish throne from the tyrant, and established the lawful king, together with milder customs; and this old debt Scotland now discharged, when she gave a king to the empty throne of the Tudors, who preserved the peace which Elizabeth had planted, and introduced a love of art and learning. Shakespeare himself

is supposed to have written an epigram, still extant, which extols James for his knowledge; and according to another tradition, the king—who from more than one testimony loved to see the plays of our poet—wrote him a kind letter in his own hand. At any rate Shakespeare's honourable position and estimation continued under this king. From some knowledge of localities in Macbeth, it has been concluded that the poet had personally visited Scotland. A division of his company under Laurence Fletcher, probably an elder brother of the poet, was in Scotland from 1599 to 1601, but Shakespeare at that time was so active in writing for the London stage that his presence in Scotland is not very probable. Immediately upon his arrival in London, James took the Shakespeare company into his pay and patronage, and called them the royal servants; the patent specifies nine players, among whom Fletcher stands at the head, and Shakespeare occupies the second and Burbadge the third place. The document grants the company their former liberty to play throughout the kingdom, and secures to them protection from all damage, and all the courtesies which formerly fell to the lot of people of their place and quality.

We have seen how, at the close of the sixteenth century, Shakespeare wrought with indescribable activity, and was possessed with an overpowering desire to indulge his creative genius. The cheerfulness, the confidence, and the copiousness with which we saw him work at the close of the second period, continued in the first few years of the third, or rather it increased. In the six years which elapsed between 1598 and 1603, Shakespeare wrote on the average at least two plays a year. Subsequently his works become more rare; from the years 1604 to 1612 there is on the average only one play a year, and this alone contradicts the notice of Ward, that Shakespeare in his older days, when he lived at Stratford, furnished two plays annually for the stage. It is much more probable that from the year 1612, when the poet took up his abode in Stratford, he not only sought to free himself from his personal connection with the stage as an actor, but he also concluded his dramatic and poetical career as an author.

Comparing Shakespeare's dramas of the third period with those of the second, the most striking difference is, as we before intimated, that from the beginning of the new century the tragedy and the serious tragic drama predominate to a remarkable degree. Previous to 1600, if we set aside the seven pieces

of the first period, there are twelve comedies and merry plays to four real tragedies; but after the group of comedies last discussed, there now follow eight tragedies of the gravest import, and in truth no more comedies. For the dramas (Cymbeline, Measure for Measure, the Tempest, and the Winter's Tale) have all more or less a tragic colouring; and even in Troilus and Cressida the seriousness and thoughtfulness of the poet in his work prevent a sensation of mirth. The merry humourists, the comical female characters, and the shallow figures of his romantic comedies wholly cease from this time. If in the plays of the second period we found the poet occupied with reflections on the contrast between outward show and inward reality, between the actual and the conventional value of things—a theme capable of the most manifold poetical representation—another system of thought, thoroughly serious, elegiac, and tragic in character, appears predominant in the grand creations of the later period. In their subject-matter we see a new moral relation in the foreground, which returns again and again under various modifications, and seems to fascinate the poet's reflection and consideration with the same power as the previous subject which we discovered in the works of the middle period. The unnatural dissolution of natural bonds, oppression, falsehood, treachery, and ingratitude towards benefactors, friends, and relatives, and those to whom the most sacred duties are owed—this is the new tragical conception which now most powerfully and profoundly occupies the poet in the various works of this epoch of his life. Thus in Julius Cæsar, Brutus' defection is represented as an act of faithlessness and ingratitude, which the spirit of the murdered friend resents and retaliates. In Henry VIII., Wolsey's self-seeking plans, in opposition to his royal patron, express similar unthankful faithlessness. Macbeth's treason towards his benefactor Duncan displays the same ingratitude in a still higher degree. And as in Lear this ingratitude and faithlessness advance by gradual progress through friends, princes, benefactors, and relations to the highest pitch of vice, in the profligate alienation of children from their father, and in the rebellion of kindred blood in the bosom of the family, so in Lear and Cymbeline we find set before us the pure contrast of unshaken fidelity in the child, the subject, the servant, and the wife. In Troilus the same theme is continued in the faithlessness of Cressida to her lover, and the violation of their leagues by the Greeks. In Antony

there is represented as the catastrophe in the hero's fate the faithless rupture of old and new formed ties of policy, of friendship, and of marriage, in order to keep faith with an unworthy paramour. Coriolanus' defection from his country falls more remotely under the same category. So again the subjects of Timon and the Tempest—the disgraceful ingratitude and the faithless alienation of false friends in the one, and the usurpation of brother against brother in the other—rank entirely under this head.

Whether the striking constant recurrence of the poet to such instances of injured confidence, broken obligations, evident ingratitude, and breach of natural ties, can be accounted for by any personal and sorrowful experiences, which would at once explain why he dwelt more on these dark pictures than on the bright opposite of fidelity, we do not unfortunately know; indeed, we should scarcely be able to guess the circumstances in Shakespeare's life which corresponded with his inclination to the tragic, if from outward facts and from probable grounds and causes we attempted to trace his more serious, more gloomy frame of mind. We have heard from his sonnets that at the zenith of his attachment to his young and noble friend some adverse fate befel him, which involved him in affliction and melancholy. This unhappiness we can refer to nothing unless it be to the death of his son Hamlet in the year 1596. A heavy blow also to his heart was indisputably the rebellion of the Earl of Essex in the year 1601, in which Southampton was involved; as well as the conspiracy in 1603, which cost the lives of Watson and Clarke. Essex was beheaded in February 1601; Southampton remained in confinement during the reign of Elizabeth; in 1603 began the long imprisonment of the famous Raleigh, who certainly stood high in Shakespeare's esteem, if not in a still closer relation to him. It is possible enough that Julius Cæsar was written just about 1601 or 1602, not without reference to these conspirators and independent spirits. From the prologue to Henry V., and subsequently in Macbeth, we see what a sympathising delight Shakespeare manifested in Essex. Stevens has conjectured that in the account of the death of the Thane of Cawdor he had in view the behaviour of the earl at his execution. Much importance cannot, however, be placed on these allusions; those misfortunes also do not appear sufficient to call forth such an important change

in the tone of his life as is to be recognised in Shakespeare's works after the year 1600. A much more satisfactory explanation of this change may be found in those inward experiences of the poet, by which, at a still earlier period, he had acknowledged to his friend that his nature had been transformed, refined, and purified. To himself also, as he so frequently represents in his humorous characters, the hour seems to have arrived for renouncing the frivolities of the world. As age advanced upon him he acquired that extended knowledge of history, and that increasing experience of life, which never dispose men with any depth of character and cultivation to be more merry, more frivolous, and more shallow as years move on. If we take into account his aversion to his profession, and the impression which the degeneracy of stage poetry may have made upon him, the crudeness of the age so repugnant to him in many of its features, and the capricious and often sanguinary despositism of the Government, we have motives sufficient to incite the poet to descend still deeper into the recesses of human nature, to roll back the page of history further than he had hitherto done, to search after passions of still greater violence in the traditions of the past, and to trace still deeper furrows on the brow from the more profound contemplation of the world and of humanity. It is, however, striking that the very play, the hero of which bears the name of Shakespeare's deceased son, may be regarded as a vehicle for the elegiac temperament of the poet. Hamlet is the only piece of this later period in which we might conjecture a pathological interest on the part of the poet; we might imagine that he had treated the hero as a counterpart to Prince Henry, and in both together we might feel that Shakespeare had displayed the various points of his own nature in greater fulness than had been possible in one alone. In one of the sonnets the melancholy feature in Hamlet's character is so prefigured as to tempt the belief that the plan of this poem was projected by Shakespeare since the period in which 'the world was bent to cross his deeds.' We may call to mind in Hamlet's famous soliloquy the motives which led him to infer the idea of self-murder from the consideration of the course of this world, the weariness at the whips and scorns of time, the oppressor's wrong, the pangs of despised love, the law's delay, the insolence of office, and the spurns of merit; and we shall read a similar soliloquy in the 66th sonnet, which the

poet addressed, like all the others, to his friend.[1] But if the reader assumes this correspondence between this personal poem and the drama alluded to, he must beware of hence inferring that a hypochondriacal state of mind attacked Shakespeare in his later years, making him regard the world and its course with a darkened vision, and suggesting to him the gloomy and dismal pictures of his tragedies, as somewhat far removed from his former nature. We utter this warning, because even here our Romanticists have sought to mislead us on a false track. William Schlegel called Hamlet a 'tragedy of thought,' suggested by constant and *never satisfied* reflections on human destiny, on the sad complexity of the events of this world. This view was embraced by Frederic Schlegel in his history of literature, and he unfolded it further: he perceived in Shakespeare a nature deeply sensitive and austerely tragic, a disposition isolated, reserved, and solitary—and this in the poet whom these very Romanticists could not sufficiently admire for his wit and mirth; in the man who, in the great mart of life, was to be the judge and agent in every question and in every kind of intercourse. These critics impute the confused and dull perception of their own temperament to the mighty mind whose measurement so far transcends their own. Even in Hamlet, Shakespeare has delineated with such acuteness and distinctness this weary depression and unsatisfied frame of mind, this exaggerated desire for prying into the gloomy side of life, and he stands himself in such clear and distinct light, superior to such mental disorder, that this very play must be regarded as a triumph over this vein of melancholy, if any such existed within him. If such a gloomy elegiac mood had permanently haunted him, he could not possibly have written the

[1] Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,
As, to behold desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded honour shamefully misplaced,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly (doctor-like) controlling skill,
And simple truth miscall'd simplicity,
And captive good attending captain ill:
Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.

merriest of his comedies almost at the same time with Hamlet, nor have continually inserted in his serious tragedies the most comic scenes full of unclouded humour. And in his latest tragedies, in Macbeth and Lear, let no one imagine that what he depicted there of austerity and cruelty was contemplated by the poet with less acute sensibility than by ourselves. It was his *intention* to exhibit harsh and violent subjects, and his tenderness of feeling in the midst of these plays ever appears in closest juxtaposition with the severity which the subject required. If anyone believes that Shakespeare, during this latter portion of his life, was sunk in melancholy, and imagines him dwelling with satisfaction upon the gloomy pictures of his tragedies, we have only to draw his attention to Cymbeline, where the poet's true theme and subject is the complexity of the affairs of this world, their apparent contradictions, discords, and injustice; and where he resolves them into a harmony which utterly excludes from his heart every idea of shallow discontent, of weak disgust of the world, and of a spirit harassed into sourness.

The plays of Shakespeare's second period turn especially upon love, friendship, and patriotism, and upon all the most sacred emotions which most engage a youth; and in all these plays we have found the key to the prevailing idea in the personal nature, history, and circumstances of the poet himself. The works of the third period take a wider range in subject and interest, from the increasing sphere of observation attained by the mature man; they enter more acutely into the investigation and solution of the profounder problems of life; they divide themselves into several groups, in which we see tragedy, history, and romantic plays appearing in much more pure and more refined forms than before; and it is singular that in these groups the different dramatic styles coincide at once with the different times and localities in which they are played. This striking and self-evident grouping has induced us to depart, in our further discussion of the plays, from the strict succession of time. We shall, as we have already indicated, select Measure for Measure as forming a transition play to the tragedies from the comedies last discussed. Next to that group of comedies we ought—according to all indications, if we adhere strictly to chronological order—to place the tragedies of Othello, Cæsar, and Hamlet (1600–2). We shall, however, shift Cæsar back to the other Roman plays, and place by Hamlet its counterpart,

Macbeth (1605); and next to this Lear (1605) and Cymbeline (1609), which present a similar relation to each other. In four of these plays we stand in the world of myths and heroes of Gallo-Germanic antiquity, in which Shakespeare sought for more powerful passions for a magnificent tragedy than later civilised ages could afford; on this account Othello is naturally ranged with them. From these works, where the genius of the poet is at its height, we pass, through Troilus and Cressida (1608–9), to the three Roman histories (Antony, 1607, Coriolanus, 1610), in which this tragic-historical style is fashioned into a purer form, owing to lesser dependence on national material and purer sources of authority. To these we add Timon (1610), that we may place the representations from the old world completely together. From this historical world we pass back again, in the Winter's Tale and the Tempest (1611), to the fantastic world of wonder; so that in this third period we meet again with the same features which we have already observed in the first; as if Shakespeare, from an instinctive necessity, seized at once on the most various subjects, periods, and styles, in order to avoid rooting himself in any one-sided direction or frame of mind.

In all the works of this period Shakespeare remained true to the national Saxon character, after he had once laid aside the Italian taste in art. In What You Will he expressed most distinctly his delight in the old homely popular songs, and in the deep effect which this simple art produces far more than any affected language of the fashionable poetry. The specimens of Italian lyric now cease entirely, the allusions to the songs and wise adages of the people become more frequent, unnatural conceits are withdrawn, and for the future, where the diction borders on bombast, the design of the characterisation is always readily perceived. If strong and vehement language is employed, it is accounted for by the temperament of an Othello or a Coriolanus; if profoundness, it is now no longer lavished, as in former conceits, on shallow ideas, but is enjoined by the subject itself. With regard to the externals of the poetic language, the rhyme is more and more confined to elevated passages, to proverbial sentences and concluding verses; the formation of iambics is more free and irregular; in that productive period, at the close of the century, there is a singular predominance of prose. Whether in this lighter diction, or in the most sublimely pathetic passages, or in the wise proverbial

sentences with which Hamlet and Troilus are interspersed in such rich abundance, Shakespeare has in this period far advanced in everything, in subjects, in ideas, and in forms; within it lie almost all the magnificent works which ever come foremost to our mind when Shakespeare is spoken of. The English language was fashioned anew under his hands, as our own was under Luther's; and with pride Meres declares of him, 'As Stolo said that the Muses would speak with Plautus' tongue, if they would speak Latin, so I say that the Muses would speak with Shakespeare's fine-filed phrase, if they would speak English.'

And this fine-filed phrase was so completely given to the poet by nature that in fact he is said never to have needed the file. The editors of his works declared with admiration, and Ben Jonson with blame, that scarcely a blot was found in his manuscripts. Ben Jonson—who, with all the reverence for our poet which he displays in his discoveries, had no glimpse into Shakespeare's soul—wished that he had made a thousand blots, and that he had possessed as much control over the exercise of his wit as he possessed of wit itself. He applied to him what Augustus says of Hatterius: *sufflaminandus erat*; so that ridiculous things might not have here and there escaped him, as in the verse which we read differently in our present text:

Cæsar did never wrong, but with just cause.

According to the present judgment of Shakespeare, no one any longer perceives that the exercise of his wit was any worse than the wit itself. If he polished isolated passages and separate lines but little (for with congenial actors but little depended upon these in works only written for representation), we know well that he undertook very essential improvements on a large scale, sometimes even completely remodelling his plays. But the 'break' which Ben Jonson wished to lay upon Shakespeare might have transformed Shakespeare into Ben Jonson. Far rather we prefer to have the man with all his faults, if they will point them out to us! For the verse quoted, even if it once did stand thus written, may be nonsense to the mind of a pedant, but certainly not to any Cæsarian statesman or warrior. Besides, where the growth is so luxuriant, redundancy is not merely pardonable and unavoidable; but it belongs to the man and to his nature, and it can never interfere with our love for these wonderful creations. This every reader will experience

who impresses upon himself the wise counsel expressed by Shakespeare's friends in the preface to his works (1623): 'Read him therefore; and again and again; and if then you do not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger—not to understand him!'

Shakespeare died in the year 1616, on the 23rd April. It appears that he had been ill for a long time, and had for this reason made his will. The report, therefore, which Mr. Ward noted in his journal, is not very credible, that Shakespeare had caroused too much at a visit from his friends Ben Jonson and Drayton, and had on account of this died of a fever. The mere similarity besides of the tradition of Greene's death renders it suspicious. The poet had lived to see the marriage of his two daughters. At 45 years of age he had already become a grandfather. He left his family well provided for.

After his death his bust was placed in Stratford as a memorial, the opinion of which by competent judges is that the face was copied after death. The editors of his plays in 1623 added another picture of the poet to his works, which is thinner, more intellectual, and not so bloated as the bust. Shakespeare's contemporaries call him a fine, well-formed man, and with this the high brow and the large, bright, and calm eyes of this picture well accord. Ben Jonson praised the likeness, and it gave rise to a thousand improved copies. In itself it is a very imperfect drawing, from which we are led to infer that Shakespeare's physical form corresponded with the normal equanimity of his mind, and to delineate regularity of form and feature without being lifeless and insipid is ever notoriously difficult.

We will now follow the poet through the series of the works of his later years, and endeavour in conclusion, in looking back upon the results of our reflections, to gather together his poetical, moral, and intellectual qualities in one complete picture, which will bring expressively before us the inner characteristics of this great mind.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

THE vein of deep thought, which so strikingly distinguishes the works of Shakespeare's latter period, beats in its fullest pulse in Measure for Measure, the drama most closely linked to the comedies last discussed. It was performed in the year 1604; and probably not written much earlier. The basis of the piece is an Italian tale in Giraldi Cinthio's 'Hekatomithi' (8. 5.), translated in Whetstone's 'Heptameron of Civil Discourses,' 1582. The cruel and painful purport of this tale is briefly this. The Emperor's deputy in Inspruck, Juriste by name, who is enjoined to be guilty of nothing contrary to justice during his prince's absence, passes sentence of death upon a youth on account of the crime which Claudio commits in Measure for Measure; by the double promise of marriage and the release of her brother he seduces the pleading sister (Exitia) into the same crime for which he had sentenced her brother; he orders him, notwithstanding, to be put to death, and the corpse to be sent to his sister's house. The Emperor sentences his deputy to marry Exitia and then to be beheaded. At her intercession his life is spared, and she retains him as her husband.

The same Whetstone who translated this tale had before (1578) published a play in ten acts upon this subject, entitled 'Promos and Cassandra,' which was never performed. Even he felt the necessity of moderating the repulsive tenor of the narrative. As the play was a comedy, owing to its happy conclusion, he interspersed the serious action with burlesque interludes, which caricature the meaning and thus afford a counterbalance to the painful impression. The sinning brother, as in Shakespeare, is not put to death; the gaoler sets him free, and carries the sister the head of a dead man instead of that of her brother. For the rest the details are similar to those in the novel.

Shakespeare, on his part, has in his Measure for Measure still more moderated and purified the story by carrying out still

further Whetstone's track. In his play the head of the dead man is not brought to the sister, but, with a more natural and less cruel object, to the judge. The sister's fall is avoided by the introduction and substitution of Angelo's former affianced one, and thus a change is effected in that part of the story which is the most offensive, because the marriage with the murderer of her brother, or with him who at any rate had ordered the sentence of death to be executed, is extraordinarily degrading to the woman.

In spite of all these improvements, however, most readers at the present day feel that all that is offensive in the tenor of the piece is not yet wholly removed. We are not inclined to pardon the poet for having brought upon the stage the cruel subjects of the Italian novelists both here, in All's Well that Ends Well, and in Cymbeline, and for having required us to look with the more sensitive eye on the representation of that which in narration falls less forcibly on the blunter ear. Measure for Measure, indeed, is performed even to this day in moral England, and that without abridgment or alteration, thus proving that the representation itself softens much which appears repugnant to us in the piece. Notwithstanding, the play found little favour with most English critics, Hunter, Knight, and others; even an admirer like Coleridge called this play the most painful or rather the only painful work among Shakespeare's dramas. He considered the comic and tragic parts alike bordering on the detestable, the one disgusting, the other terrible; he called the pardon and marriage of Angelo degrading to the female character and not in conformity with the demands of severe, indignant justice; for cruelty combined with lust and infamous baseness could not be forgiven, because we could not consider it heartily repented of. These objections would be indisputable were we convinced, from the course of action and the nature of the actors, that a sincere repentance on the part of Angelo was inconceivable, and were we to admit that 'severe, indignant justice' is the only true justice—a justice in this instance well employed. To form a correct judgment on these passions it is necessary that we should as usual go back to the motives of action, and discover their psychological connection.

A novel taken from Shakespeare's play, furnished with all his characteristic touches and with his representation of circumstances, and placed by the side of the original source or

by the side of Whetstone's play, would evidence, in the simplest and most striking manner, the wonderful difference from others which renders our poet so unique and distinct. What a richness of reflection do we meet with in Shakespeare when we search into the elements of the facts before us! What a depth in the characters, compelling attention from us even before we see them entangled in such painful intricacies! What a boldness in bringing the very noblest characters into these same odious intricacies, just as if he aimed at multiplying the difficulties and contradictions of the plot! And, moreover, what a careful construction of circumstances, so that from the outset our apprehension is calmed as to the gloomy incidents, and we are allowed to anticipate an end not altogether disastrous!

In the first place, in how masterly a manner is the ground prepared on which the poet has placed the scene of these habits, characters, and incidents! The scene is laid in Vienna. Moral corruption here 'boils and bubbles till it o'erruns;' society is destroyed by it, and all decorum is lost. We cast a glance into the prisons and brothels, which allows us to estimate the extent and shamelessness of the prevailing licentiousness; in the streets we see dissolute fellows who make full use of the freedom with which low manners may evade the law. Debauchery has become a common custom. Every mind seems occupied with transactions and matters of this kind. The man who, like Angelo, has never exposed himself to evil report, is not regarded as sound and perfect; the Duke, who has never had intercourse with women, escapes not the poisonous tongue of Lucio, the light-minded calumniator; and even in the cloister, where the Duke hides himself, Friar Thomas believes at first that an affair of gallantry drives him to that place of secrecy. Existing restraints are cast down; unbridled liberty plucks justice by the nose; law, like an unused rod to the child, is rather mocked at than feared. There is a severe old statute which awards the punishment of death to unchastity. It has been set aside for fourteen years as too severe, or, as Claudio, whom it subsequently touches, says exaggeratingly, for 'nineteen zodiacks,' and it has fallen into oblivion. It was a scarecrow, says Angelo, which, from custom and want of motion, was become rather a perch for birds of prey than their terror.

The reigning duke, who had thus allowed this law to slumber, had done so from kindness of heart and innate mild-

ness. He thinks himself justified in bearing testimony to himself that even to the envious he must appear a scholar, a statesman, and a soldier. He holds that high moral opinion that the ruler and judge ought to be as holy as he is severe, a pattern in himself, 'grace to stand and virtue go;' he considers him as a tyrant who punishes in others the faults into which he falls himself. His whole nature is that of a man of moderation, gentleness, and calmness, his whole endeavour that of a circumspect philosopher. He loves his people, but he does not relish their loud applause and thronging, nor does he think the man of safe discretion that affects it. He has a leaning to solitude, and plays the part of a friar perhaps even better than that of a statesman; his earnest endeavour was always to know himself, but it also seemed a kind of necessity with him to know men and to test the instruments of his rule. This circumspect wisdom, never seeing things imperfectly or from one point of view, shows itself also in his conduct respecting the morality or immorality of the people of Vienna, which by degrees had attained to such a height that the prince could no longer remain inactive. He is himself not of a sensual nature, but he does not, like Angelo, judge those who are so with unreasonable severity and strictness. In this mild spirit he has allowed those severe laws to slumber, but by this he has given free course to crime; these fruits of his kindness rouse him into seeking a remedy. But even while he now has recourse to severity, he allows himself to be governed by the same two-sided consideration which is throughout peculiar to him; he reflects that it would be tyrannical in him if he, who by his lenity had first given a free passage to sin, should all of a sudden turn to rigour. He therefore withdraws himself, and imposes on a deputy this office of making the change from the hitherto lax administration of justice to a new inculcation of the old, neglected, and severe laws.

For this post he chooses, with a well-weighed and 'leavened' purpose, not Escalus, the man who first ought to be considered, who is next the Duke in rank, and is like him of a wise moderation and upright spirit, endowed with all the qualities of a great justiciary and statesman, but the younger Angelo, whose severe morals and firm discretion appear to recommend him as specially suitable for restoring sharper discipline. A sacred halo surrounds this man, who enjoys an unapproachable reputation for integrity and purity of life. He presents the

strange phenomenon of an isolated stoic in the midst of a Sybarite city; we see him with a serious suitable bearing, with sober countenance and well-considered words, as if he would frighten away all kind of levity. The duke calls him severe and precise; he scarcely allows that his blood flows, or that 'his appetite is more to bread than stone.' In the eyes of the wanton debauchees he is a man 'whose blood is very snow-broth;' one who has blunted the natural stings of the senses with profits of the mind, study, and fast. In the silent deliberations of his own soul he can confess to himself that sensual delight never stirred his temper, and that 'when men were fond' he smiled, as at a contemptible and incredible thing. When Escalus, subsequently, on his severity towards the immoral, reminds him of the possibility of a similar crime in himself, he does not hesitate to call down upon himself punishment and blame, and proudly to answer: ''Tis one thing to be tempted, another thing to fall.' That this virtue and sobriety in such extreme youth is constrained and exaggerated is evidenced by the anxious care with which Angelo lays greater stress upon outward appearance than upon inward reality. He is continually upon his guard against envy, he has the most nervous ambition never for a moment to lose his irreproachable reputation. This ambition, this pride in his virtue, he hardly even ventures to confess to himself in his soliloquies. This ambition is closely connected with his aspiring endeavour after outward rank and dignity. He has buried himself in the study of politics and law; occupied in these grave employments he has really repressed his ardour and affections, he has formed equally severe and uncompromising principles for his moral life and conduct, for a knowledge of law, and for the exercise of politics and justice, in order that with all these qualities he may advance himself on the path of honour.

These unnaturally strained endeavours are observed by the psychological Duke in the useful, promising young man thus richly endowed by nature. He appears to distrust his political as well as his moral ambition, and he welcomes the opportunity of at once testing both. The investigating and observant Prince had marked how he had once before acted in a situation concealed from the eyes of the world, and this experience appears to have made him doubt whether the talented man was not, in his ambitious efforts, on the road to become a cold ascetic, a heartless lawyer, and an egotistical diplomatist;

whether the feigned show of virtue did not weigh with him more than his still untested virtue. The Duke had learned that this Angelo was affianced to one Mariana, the sister of Frederick, a noble and famous naval hero. Before the appointed nuptials, the brother perished at sea with his vessel and with the dowry of his sister.; and the bridegroom was cruel and hard-hearted enough to forsake her who could now advance him no further either with her property or kindred; nay, he even pretended discoveries of her dishonour in order to give a colour to his proceedings. In this trait, also, we at once recognise a proud aspiration after rank, property, and importance, and a proud display of highly sensitive morality; the poet has wisely started with this, just as in Much Ado about Nothing he preluded Claudio's subsequent deception by an earlier one, in order more definitely to mark out the character. The Duke, in conferring upon Angelo the post of deputy, has before him the double aim of testing how he will be affected in this wider field of action, to what steps his severe morality will lead him, and what influence his new power will exercise upon his character. The Duke himself pleads a journey as a pretext, but, disguised in a friar's habit, he watches all events in the immediate neighbourhood. The manner in which we see the circumspect man watching every incident, and, as it were, playing the part of Providence, has the effect of rendering us prepared and calm as the events unfold before us; all that is painful and severe in them thus becomes much mitigated; in the play itself we perceive the superior scene-shifter and observer, before whom the action seems to pass like a drama within a drama; in this way we are unconcerned for the evil issue of the evil actions. In the novel, and in Whetstone's piece, no trace of this arrangement is to be found, nor of the delicacy which dictated it.

Now begins the official career of the eager young statesman. He 'picks out' from the dust the Draco-like statutes; the law is no longer to remain a derided scarecrow; unexceptional mercy is no longer to prevail, but unexceptional justice. The inflexible lawyer is satisfied that the world should perish, so that law should hold its course; he imagines himself humane when, in the administration of justice, he aims at intimidating, because, by unsparing severity, the law, like a prophet, stifles sin before its birth, or takes the germ of development from the evil already 'hatched.' In this behaviour his moral indignation

concurs with the overweening feeling of his own purity and with the pride of his new dignity; it suits his inclination to use like a giant the 'giant's strength' conferred upon him. Even now Claudio and Lucio see that double bias of his soul at work in the new part he is playing; they see his pride of virtue, his desire to make himself a name, and his delight in the new splendour of his government. The young deputy orders all disorderly houses in the suburbs to be 'plucked down;' the prisons are filled with offensive criminals of every kind; even a young noble we see publicly led to prison, to the scandal of the town, for the sake of a single offence; an example is to be made of him which will strike the eyes of all. Whether intimidation from the crime in question was to be attained by this severity seems indeed to be rendered very doubtful by the immediate results. Judges, such as the Lucios and the Pompeys, who know the nature of this sin and the nature of men, give us the small consolatory prospect that this class of crime, grown indeed too great, would not be 'extirped, till eating and drinking be put down;' that if heads were to be cut off for this there would soon be a want of heads. And yet this is not even pointed out as the first difficulty. With the pulling down of those abodes of crime, crime is in no wise extirpated, it only changes its place. Habitual sinners do not allow themselves to be frightened by admonition and threatening. Besides, the instruments of justice err: the stout Elbow, of the race of the Dogberrys, apprehends a poor knave who, according to the intimations of the Clown, is indeed not capable of sinning, while in Elbow's own house matters are worse, and his own wife is notoriously more guilty than the imprisoned Froth. This then, according to Shakespeare's method, is the burlesque parody of Angelo's administration of justice, who is at last more open to sin than any of his delinquents. For those who pass unpunished in this system are just the most obdurate and the most crafty, whom the law ought to have touched first of all. A Lucio, the infamous slanderer and liar, whose familiar sin it is 'with maids to seem the lapwing and to jest,' who coldly brings his accomplice into misfortune as his sacrifice, but hesitates not to free himself with false oaths, this incorrigible man is just out of reach of the law, he mocks at its severity, and passes unpunished, while a lesser offence is to bring his friend Claudio to the block.

Claudio was betrothed to a near friend of his excellent

sister Isabella; by a secret union she became his wife; the outward form of marriage was postponed, because Juliet's dower remained in the coffer of her friends, whose favour had to be gained for the marriage. Juliet is a being who appears honourable by the mere friendship of Isabella; we only catch a glimpse of her in her prison, composed and repentant in her innermost soul. Claudio himself is designated as a man true to his word, all the less therefore was their mutual error free from any bad intent. He erred because, with a lively and sanguine nature, very different to Angelo's, he surrenders himself to every momentary impression. The poet shows us the excitable and easily influenced nature of the man very distinctly in the scene in which he is at first filled with the Duke's representations of the evils of life and the consolations of death, but immediately afterwards he is overwhelmed by his own ideas of the horrors of death, compared to which even the weariest life seems to him a Paradise. We perceive the same nature subsequently, when, in the first feeling of honour, he utterly rejects the price at which Isabella is to purchase his life, and immediately afterwards, when he pictures to himself the terror of death, he would gladly see her pay the price. 'He offended as in a dream,' the provost himself says compassionately of Claudio; 'all sects, all ages smack of this vice,' and he alone is to fall a sacrifice to a pitiless law; he is to die by that Angelo who has been guilty towards Mariana of a much worse moral crime from a perfectly similar motive. For which, indeed, was the more guilty, the anticipation of matrimonial right on the part of the faithful Claudio, or Angelo's breach of faith and dissolution of a firmly contracted alliance? Must not the similarity of the circumstance have reminded the severe judge of his own guilt? The remembrance of it is abundantly brought home to him by Escalus, by Isabella, and by the Provost. But he thinks only of the letter of offence and law, and in his invulnerableness he feels himself secure against all the remonstrances and appeals to his own bosom. He forebodes not how soon even this his pride of virtue was to be confounded.

Claudio sends a request to his sister Isabella, since his appeal cannot reach the Duke, that she would petition Angelo for his life. He knows that her youth and beauty will move him, he knows that she possesses happy mental endowments, that she is able to persuade 'when she will play with reason

and discourse.' He also knows that she sees through men judiciously; at any rate she proves it afterwards in his own case. She knows him thoroughly when she has to deliver Angelo's request to him; she sees through his weakness and love of life before she utters it; when he gives her his assurance she believes him; his firmness at first fulfils the expectations of her belief, but his despondency justifies still more her former fear. This knowledge of human nature, this mind and beauty, and these rich endowments for the world and its use, Isabella is on the point of carrying into the cloister. She possesses, like the Duke, in well-balanced proportion, that two-sided nature, the capacity to enjoy the world according to circumstances or to dispense with it. She has already begun her noviciate; the rule of the cloister is known to her; to her its restraint is too slight rather than too strict. The low-minded Lucio, to whom an Angelo and his virtue, the Duke and his rank, the monk and his office, are not too sacred to be profaned by his aspersions, finds in Isabella alone one who is capable of inspiring him with respect by the impression of her nature; he sees her already as 'a thing ensky'd,' sainted by her renouncement, an immortal spirit, 'to be talked with in sincerity, as with a saint.' When she learns her brother's crime she is rigorous enough to raise no objection to the law and its execution; nor is she so over-heroic in her virtue as not to feel the human emotion of desire to save her brother's life; she sees in his case a punishable crime, but she sees no crime in pardoning him; she goes even so far in the presence of the judge as to estimate Claudio's fault less than she thinks it. Strong as she is, she does not hesitate to take upon herself and her whole sex the show of weakness, a great contrast in this to Angelo, who falls with a show of strength and moral austerity. When her virtue is put to the test she exhibits herself in truth as the hero she had formerly supposed Angelo to be; and, sympathisingly as she had before felt for Claudio, as soon as he wishes to purchase his life with her shame, regardless of her twice-repeated reminder of their honourable deceased father, she indignantly rejects him, for she now regards his sin not as 'accidental, but a trade.' However much this severity and heroism may seem in its asceticism and sobriety similar to Angelo's pride of virtue and show of honour, yet even in this she is the opposite to Angelo, being so far from all false pretensions that, upon the friar-duke's remonstrance that 'virtue is bold and goodness

never fearful,' she hesitates not to take upon herself the appearance of crime for the sake of a truly virtuous object, and agrees to his adventurous plan, which by a pious fraud is to procure safety to her brother, and to restore her faithless lover to the rejected Mariana. Sympathy with her brother does not lead her to disregard the sin, but only the appearance of sin; feeling and womanliness are developed in the very action which seems to demand a masculine renunciation of womanly delicacy. A similar instance is again subsequently to be remarked in her when she is petitioned by Mariana to implore for the life of Angelo, whom she still regards as the murderer of her brother. It may seem to require the strength of masculine asceticism, when she even now calms herself upon her brother's death that he 'had but justice;' but it certainly demanded the utmost womanly gentleness and pity, and the absence of every feeling of spite and revenge, when, in the same breath, she petitions for Angelo's life. The whole character of this woman is pervaded by a mixture of commiseration and strength of character, of personal purity and forbearance for the weakness of others, of tenderness and firmness, of womanly timidity, and even mistrust of self and resolute decision of action, of modesty and ability, of humility and the exhibition of mental and moral power. She stands in the midst of the universal depravity, elevated in stainless purity of soul far above all the basenesses of crime, a being whose thoughts were already wafted above the earth, and whose feelings were free from the emotions of all common passion.

However much such a being, from the almost supernatural greatness of her virtue, may forfeit our sympathy, yet, if we are to give a slight symbolic interpretation to poetry, it was in excellent accordance with the poet's plan to present just such an angel as the tempter of Angelo's virtue. Both characters and the results of their meeting are only to be explained by the most attentive weighing of each word in their intercourse together. Isabella, accompanied by Lucio, appears before the deputy, and the natural disinclination of her chaste soul to plead for a vice which she most abhors is still struggling within her with commiseration for her brother; her petition takes, therefore, the significant turn of enjoining condemnation of the sin and pardon for the sinner. She is in strife between wishing and not wishing, she is, therefore, not in the humour for persuasion; in this frame of mind she cannot *will* to 'play

with reason and discourse;' she acknowledges, therefore, at the first official and laconic refusal, the justice of the severe law; she gives up the life of her brother and retires. Even this trait, this strange manner of urging a suit, must strike the sober and serious judge and inspire him with esteem. Upon Lucio's reproachful censure of her coldness, she resumes once more the interrupted petition. Acknowledging the justice of the law, she sees nothing which can stand in the way of mercy. She maintains this with judgment, she puts it to his heart with feeling; maidenly timidity is laid aside; with the emotions of pity she recovers at once her natural eloquence, and displays more and more her noble heart. At the first sound of this touching tone, struck from the soul of the great and severe woman, Angelo feels himself moved, and, as if in foreboding of the power which this being might obtain over him, he prays her to begone. She seizes him more strongly; she reminds him of the eternal justice which had found mercy and atonement for the whole forfeit race of man. He wishes not to appear in her sight as a barbarian, and, in more words than are his wont, he condescends to explain to her the human side of pity in his severe administration of justice. He concludes with a renewed refusal, and with the request that she should be content. The general grounds on which she had striven to shake his official conscientiousness and feeling are now exhausted; her natural aptness makes her now change the mode of attack: she speaks to him personally; and, as his last words had shown him as a man of sensible intellectual nature, she involuntarily calls to her aid the last weapons of her mind. 'So,' she says,

> You must be the first that gives this sentence;
> And he that suffers: Oh, it is excellent
> To have a giant's strength! but it is tyrannous
> To use it like a giant!

From this tone she passes even to sarcastic bitterness in her image of the puny great ones of the earth, who, if they could thunder as Jove does, would consume their short-lived existence in nothing but thundering; in comparing the little brief authority of man with God she at the same time indirectly reminds him of his fleeting appointment, which ought to oblige him all the more in the exercise of his power to bear in mind his 'glassy essence.' But how completely does the deeply thoughtful conclusion of this attack break the point of

all that might be offensive and irritating in it! 'Proud man,' she says,

> like an angry ape,
> Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven,
> As make the angels weep: who, with our spleens,
> Would all themselves laugh mortal.

How beautifully does this characterise this half-sainted being, that she believes angels are weeping over our human arrogance, that when she invests them in idea with her human satirical nature she sees that they would laugh themselves mortal, because this disposition has, in her eyes, no part in heaven. Isabella gives time to the silent and surprised Angelo to reflect upon the profoundness of her words and the deep traits of her character, while she now is in the mood to give free course to her eloquence. She surprises and occupies him with ever new and striking attacks upon his innermost feelings. The mere glance at this man has betrayed his nature to her instinctive knowledge of the human heart; in a moment she has perceived that which the Duke and Claudio and Lucio have gained from long observation of his character, namely, that he is deeply impressed with his powerful position and his unblemished virtue. She therefore first reminded him of the right use of his power, and she reminds him now of that of his virtue; she flatters at the same time (without *willing* it, since, according to her subsequent expression, she fully believes in his virtue) the best part in him, and by this gives additional force to that which might have been marred by her bitterness upon the arrogance of the great. She puts it to his heart that we ought not to weigh our brother with ourselves, that *he* ought not to weigh hers with himself. She only hints upon this strength of his virtue; but, that she may not have even the appearance of flattery, she returns to the idea of outward power and greatness:—

> Authority, though it err like others,
> Hath yet a kind of medicine in itself,
> That skins the vice o' the top.

She means that necessity for the maintenance of outward dignity, which is imposed upon the mighty, compels him the more to govern his faults and sinful inclinations, and, when these cannot be repressed, to cover them over with the varnish of a fair show; she reminds him thus that if deep within his

own heart he perceives the *disposition* to such a 'natural guiltiness,' and acknowledges such a weakness as human and natural, he must then 'sound no thought' against her brother's life. She touches him thus on the side of his pride of virtue, and at the same time of that hypocrisy and pretence of sanctity which lay deep in the secrets of his bosom; what wonder, then, that all the hitherto quiet feelings of his soul burst forth at last in the expression of deep astonishment: 'She speaks, and 'tis such sense, that my sense breeds with it.' He receives in an understanding and ready spirit the pregnant riddles which she utters, since every word is drawn from the innermost system of his own principles, his thoughts, and his whole nature. Yet till now he is ever master of himself; once more he bids her farewell. Then, in one simple repeated request, the fatal word escapes him: 'Come again to-morrow!' —in these few syllables the path of temptation is entered. Yet once more the proud man has the opportunity for a happy retreat. 'Hark,' she says, 'how I'll bribe you!' 'How! bribe me?' he asks. And Lucio fears at once that this one word would mar her suit. But she gives the matter a new turn, which must have again fascinated the wavering man: 'Ay,' she replies, 'with such gifts that heaven shall share with you, with prayers from preserved souls, from fasting maids, whose minds are dedicate to nothing temporal.'

He confesses now, when we are alone with him, that he is on the way leading to temptation, 'where prayers cross' his wishes. We find him thus again subsequently, when his own prayers and thoughts are at variance; heaven has his empty words, his imagination anchors on Isabella. Suddenly the suppressed feeling revenges itself on the unnatural restraint, and all that has made the man hitherto ambitious and proud fails him, his studies are grown 'feared and tedious' to him, and his virtuous gravity he could change for 'an idle plume.' He who was never in the least exposed to the temptation of light women's art or nature, *he* yields to the dangerous temptation of modesty; the cunning enemy catches the saint with a saint, and goads him on to sin 'in loving virtue.' Isabella herself, after she had surveyed the whole course of Angelo's error and had suffered from it, bears witness to him that she must believe a due sincerity governed his deeds till he met with her. And that this whole appearance, that so much mind, beauty, and virtue, in wonderful combination, should seize the

fancy of the man, should suddenly overpower his senses and compel him to acknowledge that his blood is like the blood of other men, that she at once should overthrow his statesmanlike composure, his judicial gravity and his ascetic placidity, who would not understand this? But why is not his first thought of an honourable and lawful love? Why do his thoughts tarry at once upon the picture he so condemns, while he asks himself:—

> Having waste ground enough,
> Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary,
> And pitch our evils there?

If he regards her, as was possible from his knowledge of her, as an already dedicated nun, his designs were all the more criminal. But even without this, his connection with Mariana must have been in his constant remembrance, and he had to fear her protest against every marriage; he avoids the public announcement of this secret history, and loses himself more and more in the intoxication of his passion, which seduces him to take such an advantage of his power and opportunity as allowed him to maintain the appearance of blamelessness, except in the eyes of one whose estimation ought indeed to have out-balanced that of all the rest of the world. His earlier heartless behaviour towards Mariana is thus the source of a second greater outrage; the nature at work in the one influences this new connection also. When Isabella visits him again at the appointed hour, he resigns himself like a fatalist to the impression which he is to receive from her: he is divided in his mind as to his suit, just as she had been as to hers when she first came to him. Once more she is quickly retiring, satisfied with his refusal. He holds her back. He would fain even now avoid the temptation, but Isabella is dangerous for him; she is clever, he can speak to her without the blunt distinctness which would even now make him blush. Unhappily she half meets him with a sentence which he could misinterpret with her depreciation of the magnitude of a crime like her brother's. Upon his first insidious question she quickly understands him, but she is under the conviction that he only intends to test her. She evades him with equivocal replies, which leave him in doubt whether craftiness or innocence speaks in her; the clever game of her first conversation begins again on a more dangerous ground; her misunderstandings allure him continually to speak indeed in riddles, but in ever clearer ones. When once

again she makes a general remark upon the frailty of the female sex, which may sound like compliance, he steps boldly and plainly forward; the same tongue which had uttered sentence of death against the si invites to a more disgraceful perpetration of the same sin. Not yet does she believe it fully; it is only when he swears to it that her whole abhorrence of him bursts forth. It makes no impression upon the cold lawyer, upon the heartless, cautious man, who has before weighed every emergency, and is on the very road to harden himself into a regular villain. He rests his boldness upon the protection which his 'unsoiled name' affords him; he knows that in her tender shame she will not venture to inform against him, since she will be herself more damaged than he; his 'false will o'erweigh her true.' The vein of tyranny, which had slumbered in this man of cold conventionality, awakes as soon as he is excited and has once cast the mask aside; he torments her now even with the threat of aggravating her brother's death. When he now believes himself to have reached his aim, and has committed the one misdeed, he is drawn still further along the downhill path of crime; and more and more apparent becomes the deep shadow cast by the light of this richly-gifted man, and the evil disposition hitherto concealed within his soul. He weighs in his mind the embarrassments which must result from the release of Claudio, whose death, with inexorable severity, he had solemnly announced from the public judgment seat. His pardon, unexpected as it would be, would support an accusation from Isabella, were she to venture one. But that which expressly determines him, contrary to his promise, to permit the sentence against him to be carried into execution, is the fear that the riotous youth may seek revenge for 'so receiving a dishonoured life,' and that he will not be restrained by the considerations which are to be expected from the shame and prudence of Isabella.

As soon as Angelo has reached this extreme, repentance seizes him; he perceives with fear into what evil the loss of virtue is resistlessly carrying him; he stands crippled and incapable for everything; the summons of the Duke, who announces his return and invites public information of all injustice, strikes his heart with anguish. How gladly would he believe that the Duke is mad! What frightful torture must oppress him when he hears the modest Isabella in the open street denouncing fearful accusation of such nameless baseness,

and this in the man whose virtue had hitherto appeared unequalled! How must pain and despair seize him when he hears the voice of the rejected Mariana, and sees her veil drop! How disgraced at last he stands before all the world, he who till now has been regarded as a saint! How confounded must he depart, constrained to consummate the formality of marriage with Mariana, after the consummation of which his possessions are to fall to the forsaken one, and his execution is to take the place of Claudio's. A load of dishonour and disgrace is now cast upon him, to whom honour and dignity, or at any rate the mantle and show of dignity and honour, had been beyond everything; and this veiling mantle is now so violently withdrawn that the very body and substance of his honour is also lacerated. How deeply degraded he who hitherto had stood highest in opinion now stands in the estimation of the good, of the Duke and of Escalus! We may thus readily believe him when he says to the latter that 'sorrow sticks so deep in his penitent heart, that he craves death more willingly than mercy.' For must not death to a criminal of this character have been a greater benefit than a life of shame? His life is, however, to be spared, and he is to be raised from his fall. The poet, in this character, has designed a new variation of his favourite theme of *show*. The task in Angelo is a worthy sequel for the actor who represented the gross hypocrisy arising from the systematic selfishness of a villain like Richard, and the regardless contempt of all show, based as in Prince Henry on the absence of all selfishness. The actor is here required to represent a man who is too little for the great, bold, and dangerous projects of an ambitious selfishness; too noble for the weak errors of a vain self-love, who wavers negatively between the two, who aspires after honour, who would be a master in his political vocation, a saint in his moral life, but who, in the hour of temptation, is found as false and tyrannical in the one as he is hypocritical and base in the other. The task demands that the actor should not allow the mental endowments and the germ of good in this character utterly to be lost sight of in the midst of his fall; that he should let the original nobility of this nature appear through all its immoderate errors, and thus leave open the sure prospect of a radical reformation and repentance. Or could it be true, as Coleridge was of opinion, that sincere repentance on the part of Angelo was impossible? Certainly, after this deed, there was no more *show* for this man. The

eyes of the tester would no more leave him; he would deceive no one again. He has henceforth only the prospect of becoming a great criminal or of raising himself to lasting virtue and honour. Isabella—she who has most to complain against him—petitions for him, and seems to trust in the germ of good within him. Mariana—she who takes the greatest interest in him—will keep him with all his faults, and she pleads in his behalf that 'men are moulded out of faults, and become much more the better for being a little bad.' She speaks in the sense of the prince in Whetstone's play, who says at last to the pardoned judge: 'If thou art wise, thy fall can make thee rise; when the lost sheep was found, for joy a feast was prepared.'

But the severe indignant justice which Coleridge desired was not executed upon Angelo. Not though he had so solemnly challenged the whole rigour of the law against himself and had uttered his own sentence! Not though he even deserved a severer doom than Claudio, against whom he had committed a judicial murder when his own greater crime was to go unpunished! Not though his misdeed was magnified by a new moral disgrace, by a broken promise and an official error, in ordering an execution at an unusual hour! Not though from him to whom much is given more ought to be required! Even the Duke's own feeling and sentence seemed unrelentingly to condemn him. If he once pronounced himself a tyrant for suddenly punishing that which he had before overlooked, how must he have regarded Angelo, who punished with death a crime less severe than that which he had himself committed? And, moreover, this severe condemnation had solemnly fallen from the lips of the Duke:—

> An Angelo for Claudio, death for death:
> Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure,
> Like doth greet like, and Measure still for Measure.

This equal retribution has ever been the poetical expression of a 'severe and indignant justice,' and its sentence seemed here to be inexorably pronounced. Yet, apart from poetry, Angelo's doom would not be in law altogether in conformity with justice. Angelo's double crime—the disgrace of Isabella and the death of Claudio—had indeed not been carried out. The severest law could have pronounced upon Angelo only the highest chastisement for attempt. Moreover, the Duke is not in earnest as to his sentence of retaliation; it is only one of those exciting tests

which he has delighted in inflicting upon Claudio and Isabella and now upon Angelo. He says indeed expressly that Angelo shall die on the very block 'where Claudio stooped to death,' while the latter, by means of himself and his contrivances, is still alive. And how could the Duke execute the sentence of death on Angelo, when he had himself expressly led him upon this ground of temptation and trial by reviving severe discipline, and by confiding to him so high and slippery a position? How ashamed must he have stood before his Isabella, who was so just that she liked not intent and thought to be punished; who was so mild and good that, even when she believed Claudio dead, she took into account in Angelo's favour the temptation to which he was exposed by her mere appearance! If she was ready thus to take a crime upon herself on account of the opportunity she had involuntarily afforded, must not the Duke have seriously charged himself with the temptation which he had consciously and wilfully occasioned? And how could *he* execute this severe act of punishment; he who shuddered to consign to death the gipsy Barnardine—a brute, a Caliban, a heavy stubborn malefactor? *he*, in whose heart, not 'severe indignant justice,' but mercy and mildness lay? *he* who demanded of the prince who bears the sword of heaven, that he should pay to others neither more nor less than he could justify, after weighing his own offences and respecting human weaknesses?

And this indeed is not only the spirit of the Duke, but that of our whole play, in which the Duke is, as it were, the chorus: —namely, that true justice is not jealous justice, but *that* circumspect equity alone, which suffers neither mercy nor the severe letter of the law to rule without exception, which awards punishment not *measure for measure*, but *with* measure. Neither the lax mildness which the Duke had allowed to prevail and which he himself condemns, nor the over-severe curb which Angelo applied, is to be esteemed as the right procedure; the sluggishness which gives license to sin, and the system of intimidation which destroys the sinner with the sin, meet with the same condemnation. This play, in its strikingly practical character, has become like a defence of the corrective system, the only system of punishment which a poet's moral intuition could pronounce to be suitable to the world. The Duke loves to employ intimidation in suspense, threats, and torments of imagination, but in actual cases of penalty he

permits mercy to rule when possible, thus giving opportunity for moral reformation. Like Escalus, he pursues sinners by habit and trade rather than the casual fallen one, the bawd and the seducer rather than the seduced; thrice they warn even the more punishable of their punishment; and the poetic punishment which this evil meets with in Pompey is not the removal of the person, but the investing of his crime with dishonour and with the detestation which belongs to the hangman's office. The Duke despairs not even of the dull Barnardine; his first thought upon the picture sketched of him is that he wants advice; and although in his own opinion this murderer has justly incurred the penalty of death, he attempts at last even in him the effect of instruction. It is for this reason that so much stress is laid throughout the play upon the mercy which mediates between severe justice and crime, and it is for this that the poet turns so decidedly against the absolute execution of the law, and the literal meaning of its letter. Whilst he quotes in Claudio's lips the word of God (Rom. IX. 15): 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,' he looks with bitterness on the human justice which assumes the infallible position of that Judge, who even in his *arbitrary will* must appear just to us. But, between man and man, the poet desires that every sentence should by all means as much as possible have regard to the motives of the erring, and should certainly (to continue the words of the apostle) rest somewhat on 'him that willeth and him that runneth' (*'an Jemandes Wollen oder Laufen'*). Thus, in Germany also, poetry, at the period of its revival in Goethe's youth, afforded a similar practical opposition to the inhuman and merciless punishment of errors in which human inclinations concurred, the strength of which and their proportion to our education and power of resistance we have not bestowed upon ourselves. The German poems of the former century, which stirred up all the feelings of humanity against the practice of capital punishment for child-murder, may be closely compared with this piece, which stood in similar relation to equally barbarous English laws. Thus, for instance, Chalmers drew attention to the revival of a statute in 1604, which decreed death to all persons who married whilst their former husbands or wives were yet alive.

But whilst our play in the first place recommends moderation in the exercise of justice, it occupies at the same time a far more general ground, and extends this doctrine to all human

relations, exhibiting, as it were, the kernel of that opinion so often expressed by Shakespeare, of a wise medium in all things. It calls us universally from all extremes, even from that of the good, because in every extreme there lies an overstraining, which avenges itself by a contrary reaction. There was good in the Duke's mildness, but it turned to the detriment of the common weal, and scattered the seeds of crime. There was good in Angelo's severity, but it erred throughout by the exaggeration of its aims, and, as in the case of Elbow, the question might have been put also with respect to him: 'Which is the wiser here? Justice or Iniquity?' There was good in Angelo's serious political studies, but the suppression of the feelings which accompanied them avenged itself by bursting asunder the unnatural restraints. There was good in his exalted virtue, but when he prided himself in it he 'fell by virtue.' If it is indeed excellent to have a giant's strength, the warning is given not to use it like a giant. We are dissuaded from all unbridled action, because the reaction will be restraint:—

> As surfeit is the father of much fast,
> So every scope by the immoderate use
> Turns to restraint.

As this doctrine of the harmful excess of all and even of good things lies in the facts, so it is to be found also in the images and similes of this poem so rich in maxims. Thus the crowd around the sick man, who wish to help, becomes an injury; the crowd around the beloved prince, for the sake of applause, becomes a burden. In a similar manner this doctrine lies in the characters and in the contrast of their position with regard to each other. The single character of Angelo, with the unnaturally overstrained exaggeration of his nature, counterbalances a series of contrasts; his severity counterbalances the mildness of the Duke, his sobriety the levity of Claudio, his heartlessness the tender weakness of his faithful Mariana, and his anxious adherence to the appearance of good Lucio's indifference to the basest reputation. Between these extremes stands Isabella alone, a type of a *complete* human nature, rendering it plain that all extreme is but imperfect and fragmentary; that moderation is not weakness and indolence; that far rather it forms in man the true moral centre of gravity, which holds him secure from all waverings and errors, and qualifies him for the highest power which can be required of man.

OTHELLO.

FROM the same collection of tales by Giraldi Cinthio ('Hekatomithi' III. b. 7), from which Shakespeare borrowed his material for Measure for Measure, he took that for Othello. He read it probably in the Italian original, for no English translation of his time is known.

The story of the Moor of Venice offered somewhat more to Shakespeare than that of Juriste for his Measure for Measure; yet here, also, all is poor and barren in motive and characterisation. Disdemona (for so her fatal name is here written) loves the Moor for the sake of his virtues, and marries him against the will of the family. The ancient destroys the happiness of the pair because he loves Disdemona and believes her to be enamoured of the Moor's lieutenant. The circumstances which serve to provoke the jealousy of the Moor, the dismissal of the lieutenant, Disdemona's intercession for him, the lost pocket-handkerchief, &c., are to be found in the story, but all in much simpler form, and without the ancient appearing so prominently as in Shakespeare to be the originator of the favourable circumstances which are to serve his ends. The figure of Roderigo is wholly wanting in the tale. There is a shadow cast upon the Moor, especially in the unpleasing conclusion. He allows his wife to be barbarously murdered by the ancient, then seeks carefully to hide the cause of her death, and upon the rack denies his guilt, upon which he is banished, and subsequently is put to death by a relative of Disdemona. One sees, out of this single comparison, what a gulf even here separates the novel from the drama.

We place Othello—the origin of which we can assign to no definite period beyond the notice of a performance in 1604—by the side of Measure for Measure, as a play which, though from another point of view, makes a similarly painful impression upon most readers. Both pieces demand the somewhat stronger

nerves of the time in which they originated. The bare subject of both repels us, the latter still more deeply by the cutting truth of its development. Both pieces evidence, beyond many other works of Shakespeare, that our poet's interest in moral and psychological truth was higher than that in outward æsthetic beauty, and above all far higher than his consideration for over-softness of feeling. In Measure for Measure, with the greatest refinement of feeling, he softened and moderated the painful situation which formed the plot of the story; but he would not go so far as to lose sight of the whole purport, morally so valuable. In Othello, with wonderful psychological perception, he created a magnificent tragic field for the passion of jealousy, which commonly belongs rather to man's petty self-love and is better suited to comic treatment; but, just for this reason, he forfeited the possibility of considering the feelings of his readers and of forbearance in agitating their minds. With his sense of psychological truth he sought the ground of a passion of such strength as the issue of the story of the Moor of Venice supposed, and he accepted it, when found, with all its necessary consequences. He suffered the flood of this excited sea to rise according to the power of the storm, unmindful of the finer natures which could not stand the hurricane. Even Ulrici, who generally stood on the side of our poet against criticising opinion and prejudice, considered the harshness evinced in the loss of the beautiful as outweighing the consolatory and elevating element; because the conclusion does not afford here, as in Romeo and Juliet, an agreeable dénouement. But this, it seems, lay unavoidably in the subject itself. Romeo and Juliet perish by their own will in the excess of a passion of love, which even in its agony appears sweet to us; in the tragedy before us the innocent wife falls by the hand of her husband under the frightful power of the bitterest and most malignant passion, which completely annihilates the sweeter emotion of love. This was indeed only to be avoided by relinquishing the subject itself, which would certainly be a far greater cause of regret than if the poet had not written Measure for Measure, on account of its painful plot. The question therefore is only whether the poet, having once undertaken the theme, has done all that he could to avoid what is needlessly terrible, and to soften what is necessarily severe. That he has done this must have appeared evident even to Ulrici. For he perceived that by carefully comprehending and

considering the whole, the harmony which he had before missed became apparent. This different result from a different mode of contemplation can scarcely be the consequence of an inner want of harmony in the poem, or the careful consideration of the whole would tend to reveal it; whilst, on the contrary, we are all the more convinced that although passion is here aroused and displayed in all its strength and power, and is manifested in the most terrible actions, yet no actual discord in the melody is to be perceived. The fault, therefore, must lie in ourselves. Our understanding of the play is not in unison with our moral or æsthetic feelings; either our judgment is at fault in the final comprehension of the play, or our feeling errs in the first impression it produces.

By examining the play and ourselves more narrowly, we shall discover that, so far as the object and design of the drama is concerned, our moral perceptions are opposed to those of the poet. The entire spirit of the tale of the Moor of Venice is laid down by Giraldi Cinthio in the following plain words from Desdemona: 'I fear,' says she, 'that I must serve as a warning to young maidens not to marry against the will of their parents; an Italian girl should not marry a man whom nature, heaven, and mode of life have wholly separated from her.' These prosaic truths meet us also in Shakespeare's tragedy, set forth in glowing poetry, and grounded on the deepest experiences of life. At the present day, however, we have not so lively an appreciation of the first of these truths, and we do not estimate so highly the opposition of Othello and Desdemona against family claims as was the case with Shakespeare and his time. If we follow our natural method of consideration, we do not perceive the crime which makes the sufferers deserve such suffering, and we stumble at their heavy punishment. If we place ourselves and our judgment (which with some knowledge of history is not so difficult for us) at the poet's point of view, we find his solution of the problem logical, right, and irrefragable. Who is to decide whether *we* or the poet are right in the estimation of this starting-point? For moral ideas, where they are interwoven and brought into contact with social ones, necessarily change with the nature of society. It appears however to us essential, if we would be just to the poet and his works, that we should seek *his* point of view and place ourselves in his position. For it would at any rate be well for us not to rely too confidently on our personal and present ideas, customs,

habits, and views, nor to feel too secure in them in the presence of such a man. For if anyone were free from the prejudices of his age, it was *he*. Have we not seen him, in the play which we discussed before this, taking a position in human affairs such as our German poets only reached two centuries later? Shall we not see him, in the piece which we shall discuss after this, preparing the way for all that sentimentality and softness of feeling which two centuries after him first became popular in the poetry and mental disposition of the Teutonic nations? These plays were written at the same time; do we not then place ourselves in the same rank with Voltaire, when in Othello we condemn the poet as a pedantic preacher of morality, while in Measure for Measure he appears to us so liberal in sentiment, and in Hamlet so refined and sympathetic? In the examination of the inner truth of this poetic picture we must not merely consult our moral-social theories or feelings, but before everything our experience. For we shall then easily perceive that our experiences even in the present day do not accord with our own theories. Anyone who has had opportunity of drawing frequent experience from family and married life will find that no other of Shakespeare's plays presents such rich and striking application to the actual, oft-recurring circumstances of life—to circumstances and experiences which attest that the tragedy caused by parental tyranny is often exceeded by that arising from the wilfulness of the child. With however good reason we assume to ourselves the freedom of the marriage choice and the right of the child, yet the counter-claim, which Shakespeare makes in the Winter's Tale, is the most just and natural which can be advanced: in making this choice the father should at least be heard. However independently the newly-founded family ought to enter upon life, universal experience tells us that there is no security when it has forcibly sundered itself from the elder families out of which it arose. Men who from caprice or wilfulness disturb the peace of a family are little qualified to maintain peace in their own. The first transgression makes the way easy for another; the deceitful act makes even him mistrustful against whom it was practised in love; the passion which once forsakes the path of discretion destroys the belief in self-command and in the power of virtue. And where doubts of this kind are once planted in the mind, unhappiness and discord are necessarily the bitter fruit. Following out this sad experience, the poet has depicted these

family discords in different points of view, in Lear and in Cymbeline, in Othello and in the Winter's Tale; and from their consideration he has risen, not as a passing fancy, but from wise principle, to that severe moral austerity which he so impressively acknowledges in Othello. Hence we may ask whether this elevated morality—then, or now, or at any other time—can be called too severe; and whether it is not rather that our own laxity of morals and slackness of feeling is *too great*, rendering us unfit for this austerity, and therefore insusceptible of the tragic example set in Othello, and too sensitive to his fearful warning. The question is whether this moral energy, which we despise, is not rather urgently to be commended to us; and whether it could be commended to us from a more unsuspicious source than by this cheerful, large-hearted man, such as we find Shakespeare in all his plays of this date? The question is whether the weaker feeling of Sterne's time was of more value, when people wept over Hamlet's sensitive nature, or the stronger judgment which condemns his weak-minded indecision? And while in all ages there will be men who answer differently these and similar questions, and while these questions must always and ever remain unsolved riddles, one thing is established with all the greater certainty from these very questions, and above these very doubts:—that the poet, who with such unbiassed feeling and undivided judgment united in himself the double and scarcely reconcilable qualities of mildness and severity, self-discipline and freedom; that this poet must have had a greatness of soul and spirit before which it is good to humble oneself, by which it would be well to be influenced, and by the just perception of which the richest treasure is to be gained by every thoughtful man.

We will therefore endeavour, with the utmost possible fidelity, to point out the leading features of this tragedy, in order to discover the true meaning of the poet, unmixed with our *own* views and opinions. This task is easier in this play than in many others. The sense is simple and scarcely to be missed, because the story is not complicated, because the one action hinges upon one passion of giant magnitude, the whole history, origin, and increase of which we can follow in its whole course. It is on this account that this play, beyond all Shakespeare's tragedies, has ever excited a great interest. The old editors of Shakespeare's works, from Johnson onwards, surpass themselves in their consideration of such a piece, in their

remarks, in their conception of single scenes, and in their estimate of characters; and later critics have with acuteness and penetration explained the whole structure of this and similar favourite plays.

The task imposed upon the poet was to exhibit the passion of jealousy to an extent in which the lover can be thought capable of destroying the object of his love. We think a man of inflamed sensibility, of heated blood, and of the most violent irritability, especially capable of such a deed; and even him only in the frenzy of intoxication, in the sudden incentive of opportunity, and in the feverish excitement of a fit of rage. But such a deed would never be a subject for art; such a man, acting in an irresponsible condition, would never win our sympathy for his tragic fate. Could it, however, be conceivable that such a deed could ever be committed by a man of fixed character and steadfast disposition, who previous to the act had even captivated our interest? by a man in whom this passion, one of the lowest which actuates a human being, could appear so ennobled that, even in spite of and after such a deed, he could engage our sympathy and even excite our pity? It would appear impossible! And yet the poet in Othello has made such a man commit such a deed. Or, rather, he has depicted it as committed by a man who united the two natures, calmness and ardour, rashness and circumspection—the traits which make the murder possible, and those which allow us to admire and to pity the murderer. How the poet was to evolve truth in such a contradiction, was the point which required his utmost art and knowledge of human nature. This task, however, he discharged in such a manner that the play of Othello must for this reason be reckoned among his highest works.

Let us first bring out the image of the Moor from the shadow of the Past, before we consider him in the action of the play.

Othello is by race, complexion, habits, and natural disposition, a stranger in the state which we see him serving, although he has become a Christian and a Venetian. The stain of his birth is ever kept in fresh remembrance by his dark skin, and neither his deeds nor his royal origin can free him from the prejudices of men. The peculiar disposition of his Mauritanian race, his violent temperament, the power of passion, and the force of a tropical fancy, were not to be effaced, however

much the self-command of the much-tried man, steeled by deeds and sufferings, had attempted it. He had missed in life all that most surely destroys in us the original and luxuriant strength of passions:—namely, the quiet, early, uninterrupted, all-powerful influence of education and conventional habits, which softens the wild natural power of our impulses by modifying and relaxing it from the very outset. All that birth and origin had in this respect called forth in Othello, his fate, education, calling, and life had continued. From his seventh year he had grown up in the 'tented field,' and had remained estranged and alienated from the peaceful world, from citizen-life, from the influence of home, from the arts, from cultivation, enjoyment, and repose. He was a 'full soldier,' to whom the flinty and steel couch of war was as a thrice-driven bed of down. In his speeches all his images and comparisons are taken from the wars, the sea, or the chase. When landing in Cyprus he has just escaped the tumult of the elements; his heart is opened and his tongue loosened, and contrary to his habit he is talkative, kindly, and tender; in deeds and dangers he finds the source of cheerful vigour. His spirit, his range of sight, his power of mind, his cool determination, are all influenced by them; the noblest gifts and acquirements of his nature are at their highest point when dangers surround him; it is a grand picture which Iago draws of that immovable calmness which never left him even when the cannon scattered his battle array, and tore his own brother from his side. Impelled by an heroic nature he has yielded to this inclination for deeds and adventures, and to this delight in bold and threatening enterprises, journeying by land and sea to the ends of the earth to behold its terrors and its wonders. He had been in 'antres vast and deserts idle;' he had had 'hair-breadth scapes i'th'imminent deadly breach;' he had been taken prisoner, and sold to slavery, and again redeemed; he had seen

> Cannibals that each other eat,
> The anthropophagi, and men whose heads
> Do grow beneath their shoulders.

So he told Desdemona, when he was least inclined for fable; he informed the senate of Venice of this narration, when the most accurate truth was his duty and his interest; the strongest sincerity lay besides in his nature and principles. He, therefore, must have believed that he had actually seen those marvels

of distant regions; his southern fancy had mingled with his power of observation, or he related only from hearsay;[1] credulity and superstition betray at any rate his origin and the power of his imagination; and these are traits which it behoves us to hold in lively remembrance, in order subsequently to comprehend the incredible and fatal exercise of these very qualities. The belief in mysterious powers is deeply rooted in that reduntant imagination, which is so natural in the hunter, the sailor, and the adventurer. The magic with which he invests the handkerchief, his wedding-gift to Desdemona, is not merely feigned to increase its value and significance in her estimation; she receives it so trustfully that she questions not his belief in such wonderful powers; and there are other passages in which he speaks credulously of the omen of a 'raven o'er the infected house,' and the influence of the moon upon the spirits of men. With this previous history Othello had entered the service of the Venetian state. He had become so naturalised there that like a patriot he held the honour of the state as his own honour: this he showed at Aleppo, when, in the midst of the enemy's land, he stabbed the Turk who insulted Venice by striking a Venetian. By his warlike deeds he had made himself indispensable to the state; he was 'all in all' to the senate; the people and public opinion, 'the sovereign mistress of effects,' were on his side. Among the noble and the higher classes alone he had open enemies and enviers; those who possess the privileges ever possess the prejudices also. We hear, indeed, the tone in which Iago and Roderigo speak of the 'black devil' and 'the thick-lips;' we hear how poisonously Iago, under the mask of good intention, tells him to his face the prejudices as to his colour and birth which are circulated in Venice; we see plainly at what a distance he was regarded by Brabantio, at whose house he was even a favoured guest. In the eyes of these people he was not the deserving warrior of their country, but a vagrant, vagabond, and foreign barbarian; the finger of scorn pointed at him, and he felt it. That he should meet his enemies with disregard and contempt lay in his proud nature; we hear that he rejected important

[1] Thus, as Sir Walter Raleigh, in the description of his journey to Guiana in 1595, tells of the cannibals, amazons, and the headless people of Ewaipanoma, on which Shakespeare, according to commentators, must have thought in this passage of the wonders of Othello's journey; although he may just as well have had Mandeville before him.

requests for Iago; we see him opposing the pride of the senator's cap (Brabantio) by the assertion of his own royal birth; if he so treats the powerful and influential father-in-law in the moment of closest union, how might he have acted in the case of provocation? There rested upon him, as upon the descendants of the Jewish people, the stain of unequal birth and the fate of expulsion; the more his services emancipated him, the more sensitive, we may believe, would he be to the prejudices which yet remained. But before he attained to this position of importance, throughout his whole life resentment and bitterness must have been planted in his spirit through this pariah-condition. The feeling of depreciation oppressed him; disunion with the world and discord with his fellow-men raged silently within him; this gave him the grave expression and the silent reserved nature, with its tendency to brooding thought; it gave him the inclination, so common to rugged characters, to yield to soft compliant dispositions, to the apparent honesty of the hypocritical Iago, to the pliable Cassio, and entirely to the gentle Desdemona. There was a time when this feeling of rejection produced a disturbance within him which, with one of his strongly expressive comparisons, he called 'chaos,' and which he shudders to look back upon. He had cooled his hot Moorish blood, but he could not change it. He had learned to repress his raging temperament in the school of circumstances, but these struggles, we imagine, had become hard to him, and had often been fruitless. If from some just and heavy cause the flood-gates of restrained passion gave way, then his condition became 'perplexed in the extreme,' stubborn obstinacy seized him, and the outburst of frightful emotions betrayed the inherent power of his nature, threatened his mind with distraction, and overcame even his body with spasms and faintness.

But the degree of self-command which Othello exercised, and the measure of self-possession and power over his passions which he acquired, attract us to him still more than his deeds and warlike talent. The profession of arms had invested him with calmness, firmness, severe discipline, and strength of will and purpose; these qualities related to his innermost nature, and influenced his intercourse with men. After a long camp-life he could no longer refine his habits according to the gentle fashion of courtly society, but he disciplined them like a soldier. He had cooled down his anger and zeal on principle. We

find him, on our first acquaintance with him, leaving upon every-one around him the impression of a mastery over self which is firmly to be relied on; he appears to all a man of large heart, one not easily irritated, whom no passion decides, and whose firm virtue no chance nor fate can shake. Based upon this inward repose, the beautiful qualities of his character appear the more clearly. A warrior, knowing 'little of this great world,' he had no great versatility of mind; he was 'little blessed with the set phrase of speech;' ignorant of the arts of cunning and craftiness, he was pliable, credulous, and easily deceived by the hypocrisy which he perceived not. With these, his mental deficiencies, the excellent natural qualities of his heart stand in the closest union. His confidence was without limits when once established; to dissemble was difficult to him, aye, impossible; all ostentation and conceit were foreign to him; the candour, the lack of suspicion, the constancy of this true soul, his perfect kindness, his thoroughly noble nature, were acknowledged even by his enemies. This strong self-discipline, this calm demeanour, and this noble-mindedness, were combined with the most manly sense of honour. He had *won* for himself the honour which others inherit; and he defended it with the jealousy and care with which the possessor watches over a property whose acquisition had been difficult. Laboriously had Othello thus acquired that even balance of conduct, arising from the genuine honest self-reliance to which his merits had advanced him. But even at this highest point of his self-contentment we never wholly lose the impression that his self-reliance does not stand unalterably firm, and that this evenness of conduct fluctuates in the balance; we feel that the one scale, weighted with the acknowledgment he meets with, alternates with the other scale of secret discontent springing from the feeling of his birth. The slightest jar on the one side or the other would, we fear, disturb the equilibrium, if not wholly destroy it.

But at the point of time at which the play begins, an unexpected happiness befalls the Moor, which seems as if it must for ever ensure this equilibrium: the most perfect woman in Venice falls to his lot. In the delineation of this woman the poet has sketched a character of extraordinary truth and naturalness, the comprehension of which must next occupy our attention. Shakespeare has invested Desdemona with all that can render her precious and invaluable to the Moor. He has en-

dowed her with a beauty 'that paragons description and wild fame.' Othello became acquainted with her as a busy housewife, 'delicate with her needle, an admirable musician,' whose voice could 'sing the savageness out of a bear,' and even had charms for the Moor, though he cared not for music. In the affair with Cassio we observe her kindly zeal for others, her goodness and gratitude. Her father Brabantio says of her, that she is 'of spirit so still and quiet, that her motion blushed at herself.' Essential traits of her character are indicated by the poet in the passage (Act II. sc. 1) in which Iago, challenged by Desdemona, sketches the picture of a 'deserving woman,' to disfigure it after his own fashion with an 'impotent conclusion;' in this picture he evidently takes her own character as a model. For it accords with her when he says that she was 'ever fair, and never proud,' as her choice demonstrates. It accords with her that she had 'tongue at will and yet was never loud,' as he gave evidence before the senate. We are also inclined to believe of the modest maiden all that Iago further adduces as tokens of womanly merit; that she 'never lacked gold, and yet went never gay;' we know of her that she could 'see suitors following, and never look behind;' we can observe that 'she could think and ne'er disclose her mind;' and that, on the point to become mistress of her desires, she can delay or resign them. And in the most tragic moment of her life we subsequently see how far from all revenge she is, when she blesses her calumniator, and in her death seeks to save her murderer by an untruth which merits heaven. One ironical trait is added by Iago to his picture of a 'deserving woman,' and this, among so many moral endowments, appears like a mental deficiency; he invests her with no more wisdom than was necessary not to sacrifice an evident advantage for a disadvantage, not 'to change the cod's head for the salmon's tail.' And in truth Desdemona does not, at any rate, possess the quick wit of those Beatrices and Rosalinds, which, with word-catchers and sophists, like Iago and the clown, would come off victorious in the combat. In her retired life the highest blessing which ignorance of the world and of its vain propensities can impart has become hers; the happiest freedom from all prejudice with respect to rank and position, and the purest human development of all the qualities of the heart; but great circumspection, ready activity and versatility of mind, penetration and knowledge of human nature, are not to be acquired in this school. She is regarded

by the Moor as prudent and imaginative, but she is so no further than is necessary to a little feminine dissimulation and denial, consistent with the unsuspicious nature of a good conscience; she would not be capable of serious insincerity; even the prudent and innocent subterfuge dies upon her lips, if any severity of accusation has made her timid. Conspicuous mental endowments would perhaps have repelled rather than attracted the Moor; his own plain nature would not have felt easy by the side of a woman of this kind. This genuine manliness is only attracted by the most genuine womanliness, and this again Othello would have found belonging rather to the feeling than to the witty nature of woman. He would exchange the splendour of all mental endowments for the one characteristic which belongs to Desdemona, that highest charm of the womanly nature, which Iago names not, because he knows it not or believes not in it: namely, her humility, her harmless ingenuousness, her modesty and innocence. The mirror of this soul has never been darkened by the breath of an impure thought; it abhors her to speak the mere word of sin; her name is clear and 'fresh as Dian's visage.' The genuineness of her soul and mind culminates—and this is the highest point of her nature—in a perfect freedom from suspicion too deeply rooted in her for this suspicious world. This unsuspiciousness is the source of all her noble qualities, but it is also the cause of her calumniation and aspersion; it leads her to raise faults into noble virtues, but to be less circumspect in guarding her own virtue; the excess of her consciousness of innocence makes her idle and careless of appearance; she never needed the law, and knew of no sin; she might err against many rules of conventional custom, but her heart would be pure from stain, because any infraction of the eternal moral law would be impossible to her; she has no suspicion of other men, and dreams not that they could think evil of her; this ingenuousness, therefore, is the source of her happiness, and also the cause of her unhappiness.

It is not every woman who would take the step towards her happiness which she does; it could alone be done by the most conscious design and cunning, or by the unconscious and naïve innocence which in Desdemona produces this degree of unsuspiciousness. She has heard 'by parcels' the story of Othello's life. The charm which an energetic manly nature exercises upon a healthy feminine soul has seized her; an

affection like that which Ulysses awakens in Nausicaa is aroused in her. She had shunned the 'curled darlings' of Venice who had wooed her; the deep interest which she took in the great warrior directed her eye to him, dissimilar as he was to her in beauty, habits, and years. She had to struggle with the natural disinclination to a being so diverse, and feared to look on him before she learned to love him; an experienced woman, who had not like her been deprived of maternal guidance and education, would have listened to this first voice of the soul, but she could not do so. The great qualities of Othello's heroic nature prevailed over her who was of a less sensual nature. She 'saw his visage in his mind;' her love was not the fruit of a fleeting ebullition of passion, but the slowly ripened admiration of his valour and manly power; she surrendered herself to him with the determination of a perfectly confiding feminine soul; innocent and unmindful she submitted to the ridicule of the world, and endured patiently the trumpet of report. She did not understand the concealment of these powerful emotions in her soul; it is more just to say it did not occur to her to attempt it. Othello took a pliant hour to dilate his pilgrimage intentively to her. The pity which, according to Olivia's experience also, is a first step to love, added to her admiration. She gave him a 'world of sighs;' and she swore—even in remembrance the Moor deemed it strange and wondrous pitiful—that she wished she had not heard his story. The idea of the burden of difficulties which opposed her love, and of the pain which the destruction of her quiet desires would prepare for her, drew from her this sigh, which she was as little able to restrain. She went still further: she wished that heaven had made her such a man, and bade Othello that if he had a friend that loved her, he should but teach him how to tell his story, and that would woo her. With this hint the maiden proffered herself to him—a being worthy in his estimation to grace an emperor's side. Perhaps with him nothing less than these advances from such a being would have availed to draw him closely to a woman, for he was little tempted to the service of love and women. The nature of the warrior designed for action is, according to general experience, rarely sensual; besides, his roving life had never permitted the feeling of domestic repose to gain ground in him. But that he loved Desdemona, he says himself, he would not have relinquished his unhoused free condition. Years had long extinguished in him the first glow

of passion. In the evening, when Desdemona followed him, he is called to the senate; he will speak one word with her before he goes, and it is but one. In the same night, not enjoying his love, and separated from Desdemona, he sets out for Cyprus, and with both there is not a word of resistance. In the bridal night at Cyprus they are roused by tumult, and the disciplinarian captain is in all haste and circumspection at his post. He had even solemnly sworn to the senate that the presence of his wife would not 'taint his serious business,' nor his disports corrupt it; on the contrary, if ever the light-winged toys of love should foil 'with wanton dulness' his speculative and active instruments, housewives should make a skillet of his helm, and all indign and base adversities should make head against his reputation. His love is not that love in idleness which leads Proteus and Romeo into effeminate uselessness; but, yielding to the claims of his vocation, he unlooses, as it says in Troilus and Cressida, the amorous fold of Cupid from his neck, and 'like a dewdrop from the lion's mane,' shakes it to 'airy air.' It is just this that Desdemona desires in him; she is ready to go with him in war and sea, in order that he should not be bereft of the deeds for which she loves him. And in this characteristic there lies another link to enchain him to her, a quality which must make him happy, and must dispel in him the night of chaos. Whatever honour the state and people of Venice had shown him, it had only been because they had reaped advantage from it; it had been, as it were, in spite of his person and the prejudice that weighed heavily upon it. But Desdemona had been the first and the only one to love his personality as the very source of his deeds; and this love, coming to him from such a being, could counterbalance the hatred and envy of the world. With this love there falls a sunshine upon his life which resolves into perfect harmony every former discord. What wonder that she afterwards 'played the God' with him, and could win him over to all that she wished? that he would not resign her for a world, which heaven might make him of one entire and perfect chrysolite, and offer it in exchange? She is henceforth the place where he can garner up his heart, where he must live or 'bear no life;' she is the fountain (these are all his own words) from the which his current runs, or else dries up.

So much did Desdemona in her innocence do for the man of her admiration and choice; but she does yet more for him,

and this *more* was too much, for it led beyond the deceptive barrier between happiness and unhappiness. She united herself to him without the knowledge and will of her family, and assents to an elopement from her father's house. The free consent of her father must have appeared to both unimaginable; the pride of Othello, which struggled against stooping and imploring, the mistrust of his darker nature (a heritage of the old variance), his regardlessness, the conviction that his services would out-tongue the complaints of the father, and the feeling of his indispensableness, co-operated on his side to the step which she took to please him in the obedience of the already married wife. Thus Othello sails into the harbour of his happiness with a hostile attack, and himself inserts a new discord into the wondrous solution of the old torments of his soul. Brabantio is indeed a man who, with wounding pride, would have set a value upon his Venetian blood in opposition to the Moor. He would scarcely have consented to this union, which would have appeared to him against all rules of nature; he says himself that he would have refused his daughter to the Moor; that if he possessed another child this experience with the first would have taught him to hang *clogs* on her. He is inclined to insist upon his paternal right and upon the honour of his house even with tyrannical severity; Desdemona's step appeared to him a revolt and a treason of the blood; superstitious as he is, he is convinced in the bitterest seriousness that impious magic has ensnared the heart of his child to 'fall in love with what she feared to look on.' He had scornfully expelled the wooing Roderigo from the house; he had attempted to wrest his daughter by force of arms from the abductor Othello; in the midst of the weightiest and most pressing business of state he brings forward his complaint, for his grief 'swallows the general care.' But, in spite of all this, who can conjecture the influence that the way of truth might have had over this severe and obstinate man? The improbable so often comes to pass; Othello and Desdemona might have experienced this in Brabantio had they taken the straight course of action, instead of allowing Brabantio, as they do, to experience it in them. He had heard the unvarnished story of Othello's natural witchcraft, with which he had bribed Desdemona herself to woo him; the father swears that if this is confirmed out of Desdemona's mouth as only half the truth, he will undertake nothing further against the Moor. He might

have said the same if his daughter had not rebelled against him; and he might have given her in her new home his blessing, if not his good will. And how good had it been for the wife of the soldier, whose vocation drove him here and there in the world, to have at times a refuge in her father's house! How good for the wife of the Moor to have the support of her family to oppose to his foreign nature! How good it had been if, at once upon that fatal expedition to Cyprus, she could have tarried under her father's roof, which both now so scornfully refuse! As soon as Desdemona has confirmed the Moor's narrative, Brabantio in heart and word abandons with bitter grief his 'jewel,' his only child. 'God be with you! I have done!' With these words he hurries to the affairs of state, and stifles grief and anger within his crushed heart. At the first moment he saw bitterness before him for the rest of his life; the marriage was fatal to him, and sorrow cut in twain the threads of his old life. In his anger and involuntary curse germinated the little unnoticeable shoot, which grew into the powerful root of revenge, and finally undermined the edifice of love and life raised by Othello and Desdemona. In departing, the father had warned the Moor to be watchful: she had deceived her father and might deceive him also! This was the first sting that settled in his soul—he felt not its point now, when he staked his life on her fidelity. But the significant tokens of destiny and the forebodings of the soul permitted not the blessing of possession to prosper for a moment in either. In the evening of their first union, in the bridal night, they were disturbed; on the voyage to Cyprus they were separated, and their stormy voyage is like a symbol of the fate which awaited them. United with her again, Othello stands on the threshold of the highest happiness, but there lies over his soul something of an unbelieving foreboding. Joy 'stops' his voice, the fulness of his heart discharges itself in violent kisses. 'If I were now to die,' he says,

> 'Twere now to be most happy; for, I fear
> My soul hath her content so absolute,
> That not another comfort like to this
> Succeeds in unknown fate.

It is like Romeo's foreboding on entering the house of the Capulet. The Moor is immediately entangled in the nets of Iago, which the latter weaves out of the virtues of both for

their destruction. They would not have ensnared him if that curse of Brabantio had not exercised its natural magic power.

We must next make ourselves acquainted with the fearful instrument whom fate employs in destroying the happiness of this union.

The character of Iago is maintained by the poet throughout in a great and profound contrast to Othello. Among the many opposite relations to each other in which the poet has ever placed his main figures, in obedience to the fundamental idea which occupied him, this is by far one of the most profound and remarkable. The essentially different qualities of malevolence, envy, and jealousy are united under the common characteristic of dissatisfaction at the good possessed by others. This common idea marks the characters of both Othello and Iago, however widely they differ in modification. In Othello this dissatisfaction is originally grounded on that dark feeling of neglect which his birth brings upon him. In spite of his glorious deeds he never attained to the enjoyment of honour, which devolved upon others without merit on their side. Without grudging to others their advantages, he had a right, in the consciousness of his superiority, to be dissatisfied at his exclusion from them. On this ground his love for Desdemona is rooted, because she appeared not to share this prejudice of the world; and upon this ground also rests his jealousy, because he is constrained to believe that she too has deceived and misused him. Well-founded jealousy justifies malevolence; for the possession of the wife is a blessing which others have no claim to share. In Othello it is, moreover, still more justifiable, because with him it is heightened to its enduring strength rather by the feeling of wounded honour and deceived confidence than by the sense of lost love and fidelity; and as regards his honour, man is his own judge. In Iago, on the contrary, a similar disposition appears to produce a perfectly different appearance and nature.

In the first place, he does not possess this sensitive feeling of honour and this jealousy of stainless honour as regards both his house and person. Good name and reputation are indifferent to him; however beautifully he understands how to talk of it before the Moor, entering into his feelings, he expresses himself to Cassio in a perfectly opposite manner, according to his own feeling, and declares that the loss of reputation is to him of less offence than any other material injury. Anyone who has a sensitive

feeling of honour must know men whom he esteems, for only such can wound our honour. Such men Iago knows not. To his incarnate egotism only those men appear as fellows of 'some soul' who seek their own advantage, indifferent to the injury of others; who know how to advance themselves, careless of the means used. One who 'knew how to love himself' he has never found. He purports himself to become a speaking example of this his human ideal. Towards all others he is filled with deep contempt. In the presence of Desdemona he calls himself a slanderer; and he evidences at once his strength in this quality, when, in characterising the different kinds of women, he 'praises the worst best,' and declares her whom he must acknowledge to be truly deserving to be a being of an inferior kind, good enough 'to suckle fools and chronicle small beer.' He believes not in honourable men, because he believes not in virtue; it is 'a fig' to him. To him reason alone is the measure of things, because it is the influencing power in all our actions. The simple man, the blockhead, such as Roderigo, is to him only a machine, whom he uses according to his interest. The credulous and honest man, such as Othello, is to him a 'fool' and an 'ass,' whom he leads according to his necessity. The moral and conscientious man, such as Cassio, is to him 'too severe a moraller,' a tender weakling, whom he uses for his wicked schemes. The pure blameless one, such as Desdemona, is to him an insignificant creature, and, what is more, the natural aim of his love of calumny; for he does not believe in this same blameless purity, and still less does he like to believe in it.

If that jealousy of honour, which at length made Othello such a severe murderer, is utterly foreign to Iago, jealousy of love is so also. Every feeling for this is lacking in him. Black in his soul, as Schlegel called him, he is cold, unfeeling calculation throughout; in every single action this permanent stony hardness of his heart comes to light—a hardness which only grief and rage occasionally unnaturally produced in Othello; a hardness evidenced perhaps still more, and more awfully, when he does not act directly. With icy coldness he sees Othello in a swoon, and with pitiless insensibility he sees the unhappy Desdemona, who had done him no wrong, fall a sacrifice to his malignity. Reflecting upon means to revenge himself, he forges at first double plans. Among them is even one—and this in the novel is represented as his design—for himself making

Desdemona unfaithful to the Moor. But he who only knows self-love cannot in deed and earnestness love this charming being; as he himself says, not even 'out of absolute lust.' He would, however, have reasoned himself into this love for the aims of his revenge alone, just as he reasoned himself into jealousy. He had heard by report that the Moor had been trifling with his own wife. He knows well that it is false, but he 'will do as if for surety.' He will be even with the Moor; he so buries himself in his thought that, 'like a poisonous mineral, it gnaws his inwards;' yet even this jealousy, in glaring contrast to Othello's, is only artificial; only a means to other ends, only a whetstone to his revenge against the Moor. For his wife had formerly little and now nothing to suffer from this jealousy, just because he has no other ground of vengeance against her than against Othello.

Iago is thus a stranger to the jealousy of honour and love; but, on the other hand, he is filled with a coarser variety of this passion, with jealousy of rank, with ambition of position, with true envy and malevolence. Somewhat of the kind is possibly to be perceived in Othello on the occasion of Cassio's advancement. In this contrast the whole difference between Othello's kindly nature and Iago's coldly prudent one comes to light. This is at once the point at which these characters come into hostile collision, and at which Othello commits an error against Iago, and himself causes the assaults of this dangerous enemy. He has awakened this jealousy of rank in Iago, and has spurred him by it to a thirst for revenge; and there lies a touch of retribution in the circumstance that Iago imbues him in return with that jealousy of love and honour which urges him to such frightful revenge. That Iago is a valiant soldier is the testimony of all. The Moor has seen proofs of his ability among Christians and heathens; Iago had expected, therefore, to have received the position of lieutenant; according to the old custom of 'gradation,' and if favour and affection were not to decide, it belonged to him; his merit also awarded it to him in his own estimation: 'I know my price,' he says; 'I am worth no worse a place.' But Othello, in his conduct to him also, undesignedly allows himself to be governed by undue regardlessness. He prefers Cassio before him—a man who, as a foreigner (a Florentine) and as a younger comrade, must even doubly provoke Iago's envy, and who (as far as we may judge from our own acquaintance with him) is not too unfairly dealt with by his

adversary when he calls him, in comparison with himself, rather a soldier of 'the bookish theoric,' who understands nothing of the practice of war. The feeling of slight raises Iago against Othello, and arouses his diabolical enmity. Othello should have thought thrice before he inflicted upon another an injury from which he had himself suffered so much; he should not have inflicted it upon one who could not patiently command himself in silent suffering, who, once excited, filled every thought with plans of revenge, and whose mind was inexhaustible in expedients. Added to this, Iago possessed all the gifts impossible even to be imagined by the Moor. For while Othello is open and honest, simple and upright, Iago is endowed with all the arts of dissimulation. While Othello is harmlessly trustful and ignorant of the world, Iago is an observer of human nature, flexibly and adroitly aware how to handle everyone after his kind, and to manage everything according to time and circumstance. And while Othello is patient, good-natured, and noble, Iago is active and malicious, his inflamed hatred requiring vent and action. For the sake of Cassio's advancement he had been slighted by Othello; but he feels, and as regards his mental capabilities only too justly, not merely qualified for Cassio's position; and, as the Moor refuses it to him, he is impelled to show him, with fearful distinctness, how far superior he is even to himself.

If Iago's actions could be entirely traced to this wounded self-reliance, as to their radical cause, the character would appear infinitely more excusable; but his malevolence has a still deeper source, imparting to the man that fearful trait of malice which makes Othello look for his cloven foot. It is indeed not only envy coveting the possessions and honour of another, it is not only malevolence believing itself more worthy of happiness than others, which forms the innermost nature of this character; it is far more the climax of these passions actively indulged in, dissatisfaction at the perfection of others, and aversion to the good in itself. This depth of his wickedness is manifested in his relation to Desdemona. In Roderigo, Cassio, and Othello, a man like Iago has only outward endowments to envy, and no inward superiority. In Desdemona, who excludes him from no appointment and no rank, his eye is necessarily directed to her inward perfections. Had these been indifferent to him, it would be too unnatural for him to have plunged this guiltless and helpless one into the severest misery.

But they are far from being so. Otherwise he would not be so indefatigable in degrading her and her virtues! In Othello he was willing to acknowledge a good quality, even if he distorted it into a mental weakness; but in Desdemona it would have been altogether more difficult to him to acknowledge such a quality; or, even if he does so, his malice is still more busy in defiling the mirror-like purity of the image of her being. The aim of this involuntary outburst of his love of detraction seems throughout to be that of dissuading himself from belief in her virtue and goodness. In estimating this leading feature of Iago's character, it is indifferent whether he believes or not all that he says to Desdemona's disadvantage; unconscious to himself there lies within him a necessity to depreciate the good, aye, even to annihilate it. Just because she offers him no cause of hatred and injury, he seeks to devise means for the exercise of his censoriousness and envy. His whole plan for the excitement of Othello's jealousy is based on the persuasion, which he more and more endeavours to raise into a conviction, that Desdemona is no better than others; that a 'super-subtle Venetian,' as he calls her to Roderigo, in spite of the little prudence which he knows she possesses, must understand the art of deceiving as well as anyone; that she must perceive the unsuitableness of her union with Othello, and, young and womanly as she is, must seek change, and must prefer the graceful Cassio to the Moor; that nature—that is, what *he* calls nature, sensuality and fickleness—will operate in her as in others. If he had believed in her virtue, how could he ever have believed that the Moor, simple as he too was, would doubt of this virtue? Whenever he is seized with the passing feeling of belief in her virtue, he is all the more eagerly desirous of transforming it to crime, and of spinning out of her very goodness the web which is to destroy her and everyone. Nothing, says Bacon, reconciles envy with virtue but death.

He thus sets an example of the old and sad doctrine, that the world falls a prey to the circumspect and unprincipled man of action, who is regardless of means. His superiority—all that is connected with mind, activity, and adroitness—is the first point that strikes the eye of every observer of this character; he is a type of those dangerously endowed beings whose brains have become sharp and inventive with the hardening of their hearts. It has been rightly said that this versatility of his mind and this power of his will keep our interest in Iago ever

active, without, however, blunting our horror of him; the disgust with which his aims inspire us (according to Schlegel's reversed view of the subject) is thus rendered bearable; because the attention of the spectator is diverted by the means used, which offer endless employment to the understanding. We see this man at the highest point of his genius in the first scene of the fifth act, which is the more glaring repetition of the night in which he makes Cassio drunk. He reflects on the means by which he can kill two birds with one stone, and get rid of two of his burdens—Roderigo and Cassio; he excites the one against the other; he sees Roderigo fall; with quick ear he hears that Cassio's coat is proof against a thrust; he gives him, therefore, a wound on the leg; immediately afterwards he appears again in his shirt, and stabs the hitherto only wounded Roderigo, suddenly reflecting that if repentant he might confess everything; he then convinces himself as to whether Cassio recognised him when he wounded him; he seeks finally to shift the suspicion of the bloody deeds upon Bianca. All critics have dwelt with equal emphasis upon these qualities here seen in action; qualities which render Iago never confused, never embarrassed, and shrinking from nothing; which make him quickly decided in every change of circumstance; which enable him to fix his eye upon his aim, carefully seizing his means; surely and deeply seeing into men and into their springs of action, and with far-seeing glance creating the circumstances which are again to forward his plans. Compared to the novel, great stress has always, and not unjustly, been laid upon the point that the poet attributes all to Iago's contrivances, which in the novel is the work rather of chance. The wickedness of the character and its demoniacal superiority is thereby extraordinarily increased; and it has, therefore, been doubted whether this character is natural, and whether any trace, however slight, is to be discovered of any element of good mixed with that of evil in him. The poet himself suggests this idea to the reader, when Emilia surmises that some 'eternal villain' must have ensnared Othello 'to get some office,' and when Iago himself replies: 'There is no such man: it is impossible!' But in Richard III., in the history of his own country, Shakespeare had found the portrait of a character which perhaps had in reality committed more unnatural deeds than Iago in poetry. After that, he might well assume the possibility of such a form of human nature. Yet the poet, as we perceived above, endeavoured to link even his Richard, at any rate, by one weak thread to the good side of

human nature, namely, by his superstition and the involuntary paroxysms of conscience. Not even this little has he left to Iago. Thus, at least, it appears. But perhaps, on closer inspection, one such small passage may be discovered even in him; where even *he* is fettered by this conscience, which he would have called a weakness, or, like Richard, an invention. Above all, if we admire the skill of Iago's machinations, we must not go so far as to believe that according to his mere arbitrary will he determines and prepares the destinies of human beings; the poet, had he so arranged it, would have lost the first and highest aim of tragic poetry, which is ever intended to exhibit that man himself is the originator of his own fate. In following out the course of action, we shall on the contrary perceive throughout how far fate forwards Iago's plans, how far the actual though perhaps vague consciousness of guilt in those he pursued, assisted him in making a devised guilt credible. Iago's plans are from the first in no wise so established that he had nothing to do but consistently to pursue his aims and means in one direction. In the soliloquy at the close of the first act, the idea which he subsequently carries out floats dimly in his mind. In the meanwhile other projects, such as his designs upon Desdemona, cross this first plan. In a later soliloquy (Act II. sc. 1) he acknowledges to himself this vagueness in his projects: they are only a dream—'Tis here, but yet confused.' The wit and understanding by which we work demand, he well knows, favourable opportunity; and this, therefore, he awaits for his designs. Meanwhile the purpose and the desire to let circumstances themselves forward his schemes become more and more developed in his mind, and he experiences a lively joy in finding the nature of his characters suitable to them, and fate only requiring, as it were, that he should give the impetus. This wonderful interweaving of means—and the furtherance which his evil designs meet with from his desire of revenge, from chance, and from the nature of his victims themselves—first give Iago the eminent position in which he appears throughout as the executor of fate. And here, delicately and excellently, is the train interwoven, which shows even in this man a trace of conscience and a little remnant of awe. Throughout he betrays an involuntary inclination to persuade himself that he has just grounds for his revenge, and that his calumnies will be verified by actual sins. Throughout he betrays the propensity to contrive his misdeeds by insidious counsels, and to impute the issue to the awkwardness of the im-

mediate actors. Throughout he seeks to hide himself behind truths, when he has lies and deceit in his heart. He would fain deceive even his own conscience, and perpetrate his deeds with as little guilt as possible, casting the appearance and the reality of the guilt upon the innocent. He therefore takes it for granted that he has grounds for jealousy of Othello; he therefore 'well believes' that Cassio loves Desdemona and Desdemona Cassio; he therefore even thinks that he has cause to fear for his wife on account of Cassio; he therefore finds it so natural that Desdemona should deceive Othello; he therefore even makes a show of truth and honour, as if he aimed at deceiving even a secret judge. For this reason he warns Othello so kindly of jealousy, and so truly of his censoriousness and suspicious nature; and this trait also marks the sarcastic boldness of that truth with which he concludes his advice to Cassio to entreat Desdemona to intercede for him: he would wager anything that 'this crack of their love shall grow stronger than it was before.' Another evidence of it is the diabolical skill with which Iago misuses the foolish Roderigo as a shield and weapon for his own designs and deeds. This quality in Iago, of which we are speaking, is not exactly the main key to his character, but it is indeed a double key, which in another manner leads very nearly to the same solution as that at which we arrived above. Everyone has therefore vaguely felt that in the soliloquy at the close of the second act the main explanation of the nature of this villain is to be sought. Iago, in a kind of enthusiastic self-contentment with his 'divinity of hell,' asks who would now call *him* a villain?—him, who had given his friend Cassio indeed the sincerest counsel, which would never have led him, the counsellor, to his aim, if Cassio and the Moor and Desdemona had not assisted him in destroying themselves.

After having thus pointed out in Othello's and Desdemona's nature the threads with which they spin their own fate, and rendered ourselves better prepared to see the entanglements of this spider Iago, at work within his double net, we shall now more easily comprehend the origin of Othello's jealousy, its form and kind, and its effects. We shall throughout let the poet himself speak, seeking the merit of explanation only in the arrangement of facts, in gathering together scattered traits of character, and in more strongly emphasising the principal points, upon which the reader and actor must throw that stress, that stronger light, which gives the picture its full efficacy and

truth. There are five essential agents which influence the creation of this fearful passion in Othello, and which we must consider in succession, each one more active and of greater weight than the other: the perfect dissimulation of Iago, the character of Cassio, the excitable nature of Othello and his whole relation to human society, above all the curse-burdened commencement to his marriage and the natural disposition of Desdemona, which in the subsequent development of this marriage continues to operate as fatally as it had done at its origin.

It is clear that a man so base, and in possession of such mental resources as Iago, would easily ensnare a man so little circumspect, and so unarmed against cunning and deceit as Othello. His audacious assurance in his plans of vengeance against the Moor, as well as against the equally unsuspicious Cassio and Desdemona, is so great, that at the moment he is undermining their peace he is appearing at the same time as their best friend and most careful adviser. At the very beginning of the play we find Iago as the disturber of the first hour which the new married couple spend together: he gains in Roderigo a lasting tool for his vengeance. To Othello, however, he feigns himself at the same time to be a watchful and prompt friend. He assures him that it was difficult to him not 'to yerk' the proud Brabantio 'under the ribs;' and when the latter comes to try the force of arms against Othello, he presses quickly forward to attack Roderigo, as if he were most jealous to stake his life for his general's happiness and safety. The Moor always esteemed him as a brave soldier; Iago now draws closer to him with that personal interest of which Othello is so susceptible. He is at once rewarded by the confidence with which Othello commits to him the escort of his wife. The scene is transferred to Cyprus. Iago's next object is to strike a blow at Cassio. He entangles him in the unseasonable quarrel which exposes him to the anger of the general; but he himself appears in his report as the honest soldier, and at the same time as the forbearing friend of his lieutenant. He now brings the latter from his appointment; he soon gains the appointment for himself; yet, far removed from being satisfied with these results, they are only so many incentives to him to set ever wider bounds to the course of his vengeance. He employs the moment in which Cassio is shattered by his fall to attempt to make him and Desdemona suspicious to the Moor. He enjoins him to solicit Desdemona

to intercede for him. He knows that unsuspecting he can and will do this; he knows that Desdemona, equally unsuspicious, will bring about her suit for Cassio; in the meantime he goes to bring the Moor unexpectedly to this interview, and with an exclamation, apparently heedless, he plants the first suspicion in his heart. Everything hinges on the skill with which this first ground of Othello's jealousy is designed; as soon as the soil is prepared for it this passion increases of itself and creates its own nourishment. Here, therefore, at the very outset, his hypocritical arts display their most masterly power. That at the close of the conversation Othello says of him, 'this fellow's of exceeding honesty and experience,' is the most eloquent eulogium of his cunning adroitness in dissimulation, or of the delineation of hypocrisy by the poet's pen. With what openness does Iago accuse himself of foul thoughts, and warn the jealous man of himself and his censoriousness! With what good intentions and palliating excuses does he allege that 'the best sometimes forget'! How fearfully he paints the torments of the lover who has cause to doubt! How forcibly he warns of the green-eyed monster Jealousy, while Othello had caught already at the still unbaited hook! How tenderly he recommends forbearance to him for the sake of his good name, by which he touches indeed the string which produces the sharpest discord for the Moor. Once wrapped in this veil of tried honesty, Iago has for the future an easy and successful game. He entangles the Moor in a twofold unhappy delusion; all the doubts in the world occur to him concerning the fidelity and honour of Desdemona, no doubt strikes him as to the dissimulation of this villain. The light and dark side of Othello's nature, his unsuspicious mind and his suspicion, err decidedly in the first decisive moment. Desdemona's behaviour still here and there overpowers him with the impression of her perfect innocence, but the various apparent proofs of her guilt weigh heavier with him. Her integrity rests quietly and inactively in itself, while the honesty of Iago presses ever actively forwards in new proofs and services. Othello perceives in him at first small tokens and qualities of falseness, but he imputes another signification to them from the beginning. To suffer the whole being of the malicious man to affect him is a matter that Othello understands not. His own honesty of nature has made him so short-sighted with regard to knaves and knavish tricks, that even that accomplice of Iago's, the

unfortunate Roderigo, surpasses him in acuteness. He is fascinated by a passion as dazzling as that of the Moor, he is urged by a sensual love for Desdemona, and Iago keeps up this passion in him just as artfully as that in Othello, and deceives both credulous souls in a similar manner. Even this weak head, however, has, at any rate, fits of suspicion against the false ancient, suggested to him by fear of the loss of this money; but Othello, who is threatened by a loss so much greater, and who is so shattered by the mere idea of this loss, is not provoked by this grief to the shadow of a suspicion against the suspecter of his wife; nay, even after his fearful deed, even after the first doubt in his conviction of Desdemona's infidelity, no doubt of Iago's integrity touches his soul. So securely had the revengeful hypocrite taken possession of this heart for the purpose of filling it with incurable jealousy.

By this plan he could hope to work out his revenge in the boldest manner, because the most favourable material for it (for *this* very plan) lay ready for him in the persons and circumstances. In casting suspicion upon Desdemona's connection with Cassio, the mere personal appearance of the latter was strikingly in his favour. He had acted the mediator between her and Othello, and how truly and silently he had kept this secret is exhibited in his conversation with Iago (Act. I. sc. 1), where he affects ignorance of the whole marriage history. He had become so intimate with both that in intercourse with Desdemona he could indulge in all proper familiarity. She had been so frank with him that she had often spoken to him 'dispraisingly' of the Moor, while he had taken the part of the latter; and that Othello knew. In outward manners, form, and appearance, no greater contrast can be imagined than that between Cassio and the Moor. Beautiful in figure and face, young, of 'a smooth dispose,' as Iago says, 'almost damned in a fair wife,' endowed with all the gifts and arts of the elegant world, he possesses all that in which the Moor knows himself most defective; he is naturally an object to attract the attention of women, and in this point he is just as seducing as he is seducible. If on this very point the mistrust of the Moor in his own endowments could be stirred up, it would be easy to direct suspicion to this gifted substitute. So long as he still believed in Desdemona's virtue, it might appear to him compatible with it for her to have indulged a weakness for this very Cassio. For there was no

other man so faithful to his duty, so heartily devoted to his general, no other who so scrupulously valued his good name, no other who with more feminine timidity insisted upon good morals. The vices of men, such as drunkenness, were foreign and detestable to him; the name 'drunkard' from Othello's lips was as sad to him as to Desdemona was that invective against her womanly honour, which she could not utter. But all these virtues were almost too refined to furnish confidence in their stability; Iago was thus right when he regarded Cassio as a man formed for suspicion. That his good-nature at times passes into quarrelsomeness is known by all the world; that his aversion to wine may be overcome as occasion offers, and that then even his zeal for service may be exchanged for forgetfulness of duty, has been a matter of experience to Othello. If anything is yet wanting to make him a fit person for Iago's tragedy, it is that similar unsuspiciousness of character which belonged to Desdemona and Othello, that similar confidence in Iago's honesty and friendship which he, too, doubts not even to the end.

Iago's power of dissimulation and Cassio's seducing gifts would nevertheless have not ensnared the Moor into that immoderate error of his suspicion, if all the earlier circumstances of his life and the manner of his union with Desdemona had not facilitated its growth. Othello knows himself quite free from the empty motives which urge others to jealousy. In himself he is as incapable of groundless suspicion as of groundless anger. It troubles him not if others extol his wife's beauty and endowments, even though they were to depreciate him by the comparison. His self-reliance is still strong: 'she had eyes,' he says, 'and chose me.' But this self-reliance was just on this point so easily to be shaken. For as soon as Iago only reminds him of the arts of the Venetian women, 'not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown,' of the Venetian deceit which Desdemona practised on her father, of the dissimulation with which she had shut his eyes, then the ardent imagination of the susceptible man is directed to the point where there is no lack of inflammable material. Iago uses to the Moor the very words of Brabantio, which he, being present, had heard: 'She did deceive her father, marrying you; and when she seemed to shake and fear your looks, she loved them most.' 'And,' says the struck Moor, 'so she did.' The expression which is to be thrown into these words cannot be significant enough. In

passages like these Ira Aldridge put to shame the most cultivated actor. The curse of the father discharges itself in them upon Othello's soul; the light of his faith in Desdemona is with them extinguished. From this time musingly and silently he loses himself in the thought, whether in her choice she may not have erred against nature, and in pursuing this path both he and she are lost. Iago seizes it at once with the ready skill of his wickedness, well knowing that this is 'the point' which it behoves him to cultivate. Under the appearance of bold and inconsiderate openness, he represents to him, with all the emphasis possible, the unnaturalness of their unsuitability, and suggests for his consideration whether 'a will most rank and thoughts unnatural' may not have been at work in Desdemona whether, recoiling to her better judgment, she may not have repentingly compared him with her own countrymen. This rankles in the mind of the Moor. Because his years decline yet therefore not so much—but because those soft parts of conversation are lacking, and because he is black—how possible that against these her taste and her prejudice may have stumbled! From this point of view how readily does his wife seem exposed to the most natural doubts! Still self-reliance and mortification struggle within him, but his fancy lingers already upon the one fearful idea: 'I am deceived and abused.' His first resolve is hatred and rejection. To torment himself with suspicion lies not in his nature; he will not doubtingly love, and loving he will not doubt; if he *must* doubt, he will see and prove, and according to the result he will make an end of love or jealousy. This is now an incitement to Iago to provide an apparent proof.

Immediately after Iago (Act III. sc. 1) had sown the first seeds of suspicion in Othello's bosom, Desdemona had left at his request. At this threshold of the labyrinth of jealousy the full impression of his present happiness stood before Othello's versatile fancy, joined to the impression of the fearful future which would await him if he had ever cause to renounce that happiness; and these impressions disburden themselves in those few words so full of meaning, so full of mingled happiness and bitter foreboding, which must be regarded as the commencement of the catastrophe, as the main substance of Othello's passion, and as the guide to its development:—

> Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul
> But I do love thee! and when I love thee not
> Chaos is come again!

No doubt has been yet named to him, and already before his busy imagination there stands the complete picture of his possible misery, which according to his fashion he compresses into a single word. Subsequently Desdemona's mere appearance seems for once to master his doubt, and he goes away with her. But immediately afterwards, when he returns, he is entirely overpowered, and that without fresh cause, by the idea that the endless happiness which this wife had prepared for him was only a delusion, and that she had been false to him. But how is it possible that this man, so deliberate in fight and danger, and who subsequently executes that fearful punishment on Desdemona with such considerate calmness, should now be so dazzled by the mere idea of possible things as to take them for actual? How is it possible that his whole being should be shattered by a fancy and be upset by a delusion? Is it not unnatural that thus, without conceivable ground, Othello should suddenly be so utterly disturbed that he utters a painful farewell to his tranquil mind, to his content, to his glad vocation—war, that he sees his occupation gone, that he seizes in rage and fearful excitement the destroyer of his peace, and entreats him for proofs when further proof was scarcely indeed required? We must, however, bear in mind that *all* false jealousy rests on mere imagination; that this delusion, because it is a weed, grows luxuriously upon the poorest soil and in the scantiest space, and that here a soil of fatal fertility was prepared, inasmuch as position and circumstances gave an unusual force and depth to the suspicion, and opened to the quick eye of doubt so wide a view that the near would almost necessarily be overlooked. We must bear in mind that in this first inroad of a suspicious fancy lay the greatest disturbing power, destroying at once in the Moor all resolve and all ability for examination. We must bear in mind, finally and above all, the fearful excitement that would be produced in Othello from the whole course of his life and fate at the mere supposition of Desdemona's infidelity. If she were really false and untrue towards him, she had not fallen from him in the ebullition of passion, but her falseness was premeditated, and the marriage with him had been a finely woven deceit! His noble nature, his childlike openness, had been abused in the basest manner, as Iago forgets not to impress upon him; with quiet circumspection a disgraceful game had been carried on with his manly uprightness and candour. All the pity and sympathy which she had shown

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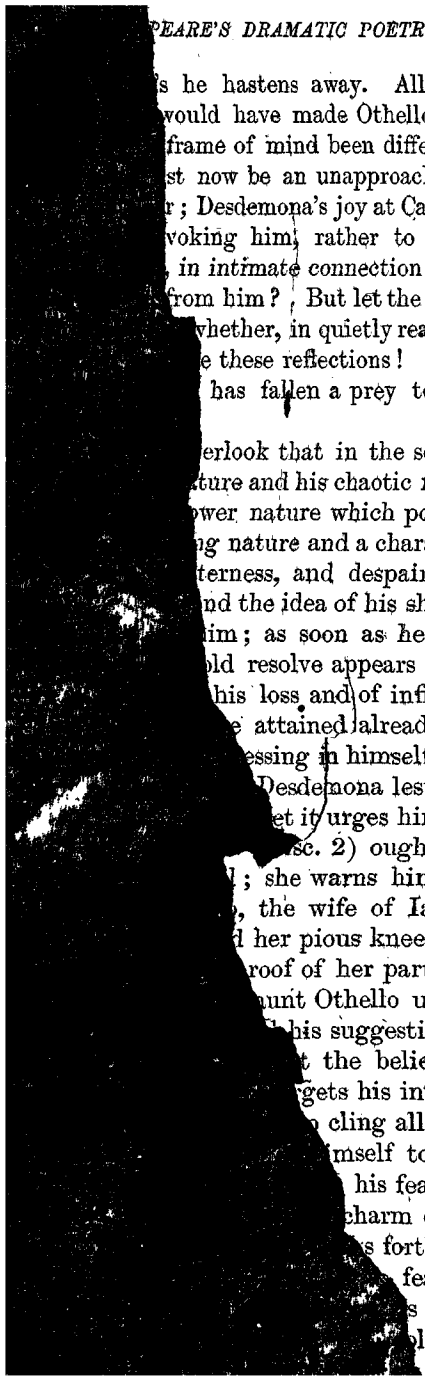

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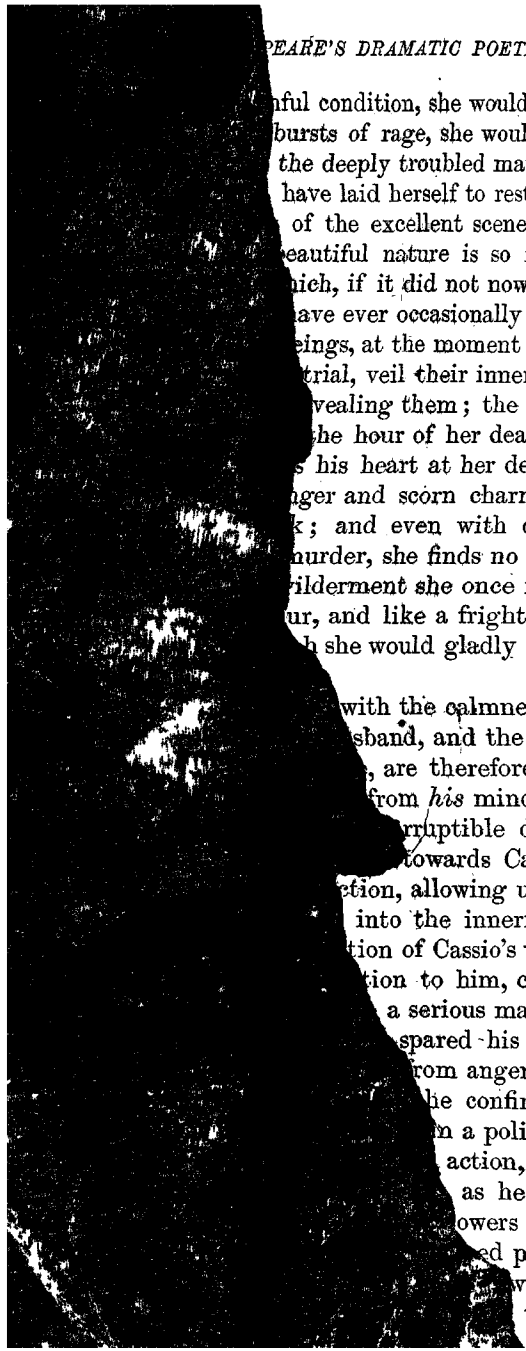

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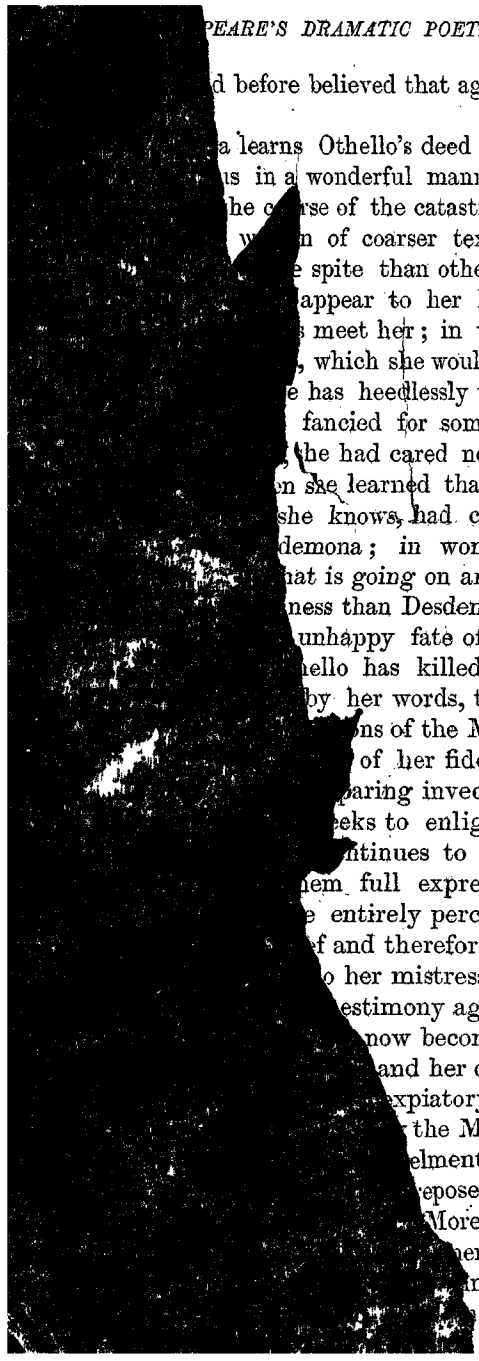

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enced and entwined itself with our [illegible] other poem even of our own age [illegible] having done, with the exception of Fau[illegible]

There were special historical and litera[illegible] Shakespeare's time, which must have brought [illegible] in an unusual manner before the poet's mind, a[illegible] suggested it to him for closer consideration. The ev[illegible] took place in Scotland in 1567, on the murder of Darnley the marriage of his widow, Mary Stuart, with Lord Bothwell, afforded in the immediate past a living counterpart to the action in Hamlet. There was too an older play of Hamlet, which intervened between the original source and Shakespeare's tragedy. At the close of the sixteenth century, when revenge was the theme for competition throughout a whole series of tragedies, this subject was not overlooked. According to Thomas Nash, in his preliminary epistle to the 'Menaphon' of Robert Greene, to which we have before referred, there was a drama upon Hamlet as early as 1589, and perhaps even 1587; in the year 1594 a play with this title was represented at the theatre at Newington Butts, and this may have been that older Hamlet. Several English critics believe this old play itself to be the work of Shakespeare's youthful hand. And it is certain that the poet was occupied with this subject, as with Romeo and Juliet, at an earlier stage of his dramatic career. According to the much enlarged quarto edition of 1604, the play received the form in which we now read it in about 1601–2; indeed, the manifold allusions in it to Julius Cæsar would lead us to believe that this last revision occurred at the same time as the Roman historical play of this title. But in the first cast the play did not stand as we now read it. We possess a quarto edition of 1603, which is regarded indeed by Collier, Dyce, and Mommsen as a faulty and illegal print of the complete piece, but on the other hand, in the indisputably more reliable opinion of Knight, Delius, and Staunton, it contains an earlier design of the poet's, though in a mutilated form; the comparison of this with the riper work, just as in the case of the two Romeos, manifests the advancing mind of the poet in that point especially which interests us and our method of interpretation; namely, in the more distinct formation of the play upon one fundamental idea. That the edition of 1603 is not merely a pirated copy of the complete work may be gathered from the different names which Polonius and his

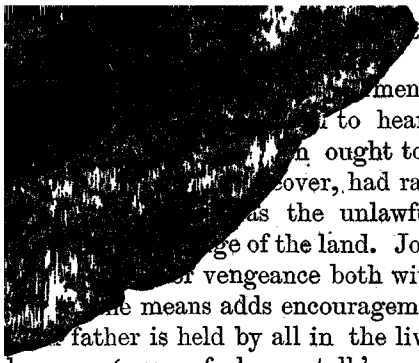
Corambis, and the other Montano. acter proves that Shakespeare's early d, it is true, all the actual circumstances no exact realisation of their intrinsic mean- it a series of passages which the poet must tly inserted for the purpose of more distinctly sing his hero, and his nature and course of action. significant contrast between Horatio's character and Hamlet's, which is put into the mouth of the latter just before the play of Gonzago's death, is not in the older text. All those sententious allusions to the meaning of the play in Gonzago's part are wanting. The short soliloquy (Act III. sc. 2) is omitted, in which the motive for Hamlet's passionate agitation is stated, and which explains the scene with his mother and the murder of Polonius. In the soliloquy of the king (Act III. sc. 3) all the finely interspersed contrasts are absent, which assist to a more true understanding of the piece. We miss the whole scene in which Hamlet falls in with Fortinbras' troops, and the whole soliloquy which affords the readiest key to the idea of the entire work. If all these were the accidental omissions of a fraudulent copyist, there must have been a kind of method in his want of reading. But it is far more probable that the poet in the later revision of his work added these enlightening touches to the riddle of his drama, which for so long a time was a book with seven seals, and which at its first appearance was probably in no less degree a mystery to many.

Since this riddle was solved by Goethe in his 'Wilhelm Meister,' we can scarcely conceive that it ever was one, and we are hardly disposed to say anything more towards its elucidation. No work of Shakespeare's is truly more clear in its design than this, although none, if we except the sonnets, has been so long and so entirely misunderstood. We have before amply quoted Voltaire's complimentary verdict. Malone also could make nothing out of the play; he considered that Hamlet's feigned madness conduced little to its object. Others, like Akenside, maintained that the poet intended to attribute actual madness to Hamlet; and we know that Tieck also attempted similar old innovations. Johnson discovered no adequate cause for Hamlet's feigned madness; he called Hamlet rather a tool than a free acting being, because he makes no preparation for the punishment of the convicted king, who falls at last in consequence of a circumstance in nowise brought about by the son,

in whom revenge was a duty. [redacted] out in Voltaire's censures sudden[redacted] dust, when Goethe demonstrated the [redacted] of the play; all that appeared to lie [redacted] reproaches of Johnson and Malone was cl[redacted] many eulogiums, when it was shown that it [redacted] of the poet to represent his hero as a man w[redacted] been disturbed by the shock of too difficult a task; to [redacted] according to that profound simile of Horatio's, to the dr[redacted] summit of a steep whose height makes him giddy: as Goethe has expressed it, to delineate a mind oppressed by the weight of a deed which he fails to carry out.

That this was really the design of the poet is evident from the facts themselves; but it is also made palpable by express and repeated reference to the meaning he intended to convey through them, and this even to a greater degree than in Romeo or in any other play. Let us once more clearly consider both, namely, the facts and the elucidations which the tragedy itself unfolds.

An heroic king of Denmark—a man without 'his like,' of noble form and majesty—was murdered by his brother, who supplanted on the throne the son of the deceased king, and had even during the life of the latter stolen the affections of his queen by insinuation and gifts. Ambition, thirst of power, and evil desires, had urged him to this unnatural deed; he understood how 'with devotion's visage, and pious action, so to sugar o'er the devil himself,' that the queen, now his wife, surmises not the murder. No outward comeliness commends the bloated Claudius, whom Hamlet's scornful epithets (paddock, gib, peacock, &c.) designate as a voluptuous vain being, whose daily life is passed in scheming and carousing. No inward virtues adorn the hypocritical 'laughing villain;' unless it be that quick perception of his understanding and of his guilty conscience, which makes him attentive to every danger and threat, which makes him interpret every event, every word, and every sigh, and which makes him gather round him with skilful grasp the weakest spies and tools. The ghost of the fallen hero now rises from the grave, and conjures the son, if he has nature in him, not to leave his murder unrevenged, not to sit in inactive indifference at his corruption, or, in his own significant image, not to be so dull concerning the unnatural crime, as 'the fat weed that rots itself in ease on Lethe wharf.' A slave



ments of purgatory, Hamlet lays
to heart; revenge in that age was
n ought to have been discharged un-
over, had rather to execute justice than
s the unlawfully supplanted heir to the
e of the land. Joined to the powerful impulses
vengeance both without and within, the readi-
e means adds encouragement to the good cause. The
father is held by all in the liveliest and deepest remem-
brance; 'every fool can tell,' according to the grave-digger,
the year and date on which he overcame old Norway; towards
the new king the people prove refractory after the death of
Polonius, and are ready to establish another sovereign in
Laertes. He is therefore no adversary to be feared, unless it be
from the one cause that he himself fears and is cautious. But
the young Hamlet has all advantage over him in the favour of
the people, who 'dip all his faults in their affection;' nay,
even his own mother, who is attached to him by a love almost
extravagant, would be an ally to him in case of need rather
than to her new consort. These outward means, which lie in
the circumstances of his position, are strengthened by the
personal gifts of Hamlet, who in Ophelia's sight is courtier,
soldier, and scholar, and who is endowed with powers of mind and
body apparent to ourselves; just thirty years of age, he has
reached a period at which physical and moral strength are most
fully and most equally balanced. The cause, the motives, the
means, and the power all exist; nothing is indeed lacking to
secure the full accomplishment of the required deed of ven-
geance but the good will to do so. This, too, Hamlet possesses.
He swears by Heaven to the ghost of his beloved father that he
will make his command his watchword, and 'from the table of
his memory wipe away all trivial fond records,' that 'with wings
as swift as meditation, or the thoughts of love,' he will swoop
to his revenge.

Yet in this first soliloquy it strikes us with surprise that the
man so apparently resolute should immediately call on his
heart to 'hold,' and to his sinews to 'grow not instant old, but
to bear him stiffly up;' and that, in the deepest emotion, he
should lament that time was 'out of joint,' and that he was
born 'to set it right.' It is strange that he does not at once
impart his secret to the friends to whom his father had appeared,
and only subsequently to one of them, namely, to Horatio; that

he chooses far-fetched means for [illegible] himself mad like Brutus, when [illegible] to overthrow; that he fortifies himself [illegible] suspicion of those who held *him* in fear, [illegible] means he attracts observation to his action [illegible] distrust of the king, whom the desponding sadness [illegible] son has already disquieted. Playing the part of [illegible] deranged, Hamlet is now seen exciting alarm at [illegible] putting riddles to the spies, tormenting his beloved, forgetful of his mission. Two months pass by, and he thinks not of his watchword, until a declaiming player (Act II. sc. 2), 'in a fiction, in a dream of passion,' reminds him of his own part; conscience-stricken he then assails himself with violent invectives, calls himself 'John a-dreams, a dull and muddy-mettled rascal,' a coward who takes every mortification, who is 'pigeon-livered, and lacks gall to make oppression bitter.' But even now this merited self-reproach urges him not to action; the effect of the players upon his own soul suggests rather the idea of 'catching' the king's conscience in a play. By the lapse of time the procrastinator is even led to doubt whether the spirit of his father, whom at the time with such proud emphasis *he* had called to his friends 'an honest ghost,' may not have been the devil, who 'is very potent with such spirits,' weak and melancholy as his are.

The play is acted. Before there ensues any appeal to the conscience of the king, the poet has made use of it to speak first to the conscience of Hamlet himself, and at once to convey to the spectator the meaning of his work. Scarcely has Hamlet interpreted the language of the acted queen into 'wormwood' for his mother, than he himself receives the same from Gonzago, who plays the part of his father, and the voice of the ghost speaks to him again in the words:—

> What we determine, oft we break.
> Purpose is but the slave to memory;
> Of violent birth, but poor validity:
> Which now, like fruit unripe, sticks on the tree;
> But fall, unshaken, when they mellow be.
> Most necessary 'tis that we forget
> To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt:
> What to ourselves in passion we propose,
> The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.
> The violence of either grief or joy
> Their own enactures with themselves destroy.

[redacted]swers. Hamlet cautiously orders [redacted] that he may himself appear 'idle.' [redacted] of the guilt of the murderer. The [redacted]e king alone, trying to pray and to repent [redacted] Almost every sentence of his soliloquy bears [redacted]with the state of Hamlet's mind, in whom the [redacted]nge exists in the same proportion as in Claudius the [redacted]pentance. The hypocritical murderer stands waver- [redacted]etween his deed and his repentance, just as Hamlet does between the deed and its revenge. The king has the will to pray, as Hamlet has to punish; but the impulse of their nature accords not with their task; 'the stronger guilt defeats the strong intent' of the praying man, the extreme of conscientiousness causes the backward ebb of the avenger's passion even when it has begun to flow. Thus it is with both, as Claudius says, that they 'like men to double business bound, stand in pause where they shall first begin, and both neglect.' He knows that Heaven is rich in mercy, but he finds no means of obtaining it; just as Hamlet sees the path of punishment prescribed to him by Heaven, and in his softness dares not tread it. 'Whereto serves mercy,' asks Claudius—whereto serves punishment, might Hamlet also ask, 'but to confront the visage of offence?' The twofold force of prayer is

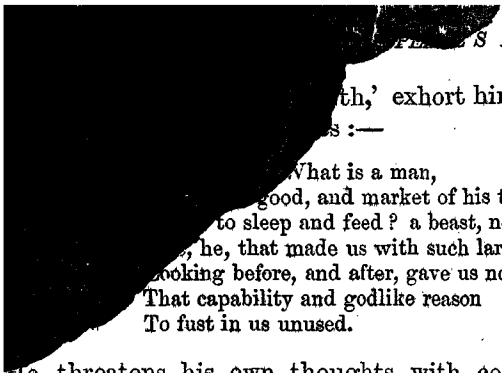
> To be forestall'd, ere we come to fall,
> Or pardon'd, being down;

and similarly might Hamlet say immediately afterwards, when Claudius lays a snare for his life, the twofold force of retribution is to punish the crime accomplished and to prevent its repetition. The king attempts the penitential prayer which he has at heart, yet there is not that active repentance at work which would lead him to renounce at once the possession of the crown and of the queen; so Hamlet attempts revenge, but conscientiousness effects in him that which hardness of heart does in the king, that he cannot bring his will to action. Repentance can do all things, says Claudius, 'yet what can it, when one cannot repent?' So Hamlet gives all scope to revenge, but the avenger himself is lacking. The king's soul, entangled in the meshes of crime, strives to free itself, and becomes more and more ensnared; Hamlet's excited feelings seem impatient of restraint, while all the more surely he is held captive by procrastination.

Just at the moment when these considerations are passing

through the king's mind, Hamlet a[illegible] opportunity is given him for the acc[illegible] His temper, too, is stimulated to the d[illegible] of ghosts. But, for ever irresolute, he [illegible] cause for delay. Because he is praying, he [illegible] murderer to heaven, who killed his father 'with [illegible] broad blown;' he loses the convenient opportuni[illegible] another more fearful, more effective; he goes away, [illegible] spared king arises to tell us—that he could not pray. Ham[illegible] excited mood however continues at this time, and after the agitation of the play he alarms his mother's conscience by words that enter into her ears like daggers; then in the eagerness of his conversation with her, believing he hears the listening king, he thinks to strike him through the arras, and kills the father of his beloved! The man who thus conscientiously hesitates to avenge a murder has now unwarily become a murderer himself. Hamlet himself regards the mistake not only as a punishment of Polonius, but also of himself. Yet a more direct punishment for him is the re-appearance of the ghost. The spirit comes to dissuade him from the persecution of his mother, which he had previously forbidden, and to admonish him again to vengeance on the murderer, which he had before so imperatively commanded. The conscience-stricken son knows at once that the ghost is come to chide him who is 'lapsed in time and passion,' who, in alternate moods of over-excitement and procrastination, has blunted the edge of his resolution.

The error in his revenge ought to be sufficient to challenge Hamlet urgently at last to act in earnest; but he falls into still more striking delay. He meets young Fortinbras, who, in his ready energy for action, presents a striking contrast to Hamlet. He had some old offence of his father's to revenge on Denmark, not indeed the murder of a relative; he took up arms contrary to the will of his uncle, and when the latter arrests his progress his youthful energy seeks an outlet in a war against the Polack for the sake of 'a little patch of ground, that hath in it no profit but the name.' Hamlet is himself obliged to acknowledge that a divine ambition puffs the spirit of the ardent warrior, although he considers that he errs in his object and exposes himself 'for an egg-shell;' while he himself, with the strongest inducements, provided with will, power, and means, remains inactive. He regards this encounter as a fresh cause to urge his slumbering vengeance; he himself perceives



th,' exhort him. He assails him-

s :—

What is a man,
ood, and market of his time,
to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.
, he, that made us with such large discourse,
ooking before, and after, gave us not
That capability and godlike reason
To fust in us unused.

He threatens his own thoughts with contempt, if, from this time, they are not bloody. And yet he is even now upon the point of suffering himself to be quietly sent to England, far enough from the object of his vengeance. It is only through an accident, which lay not in his own hands, that by an assault of pirates he again speedily returns to Denmark.

Even now he follows not out his aim, although he has learned that the king attempts his life. But as every moment may now bring the intelligence from England that the ambassadors have been executed in his stead, and as this intelligence must lead to decisive explanations between him and the king, this necessity and the fear of the king's snares urge him strongly to action; his weakness now becomes most apparent; he is sick at heart; and weary of spirit. And so the design of his uncle overtakes him sooner than his own vengeance strikes his uncle, and it seems as if neither the duty of punishment nor the condition of self-defence would ever have brought him to the avenging thrust, if the agitation of the death-wound had not at length roused him against the poisoner, to whose designs the life even of the queen, whose soul he had murdered, is unexpectedly sacrificed.

Thus evident in itself, the main action of the play and the conduct of the hero become still more evident from the unusually expressive contrast to Hamlet in which Shakespeare has placed Laertes, in whose history and behaviour Hamlet himself discovers the contrast to his own case. Perhaps nowhere else is the design of the poet so strikingly prominent in the touches of his characterisation as here. Hamlet has stabbed Polonius. His son Laertes—somewhat of a hero *à la mode*, a fencer, a knight of honour of the French school, of temperament as choleric as Hamlet's is melancholy, a man utterly unendowed with the splendid physical and mental gifts

of Hamlet—flees from Paris to distant Denmark on the death of his father. Of all the precepts of his father above all appears to have remained with him:—

> Beware
> Of entrance to a quarrel; but being in,
> Bear it, that the opposer may beware of thee.

The one thought of vengeance fills his mind, and every nerve in him is strained to action, even before he knows the murderer with any certainty. The king has had the body of Polonius secretly interred, and by this means draws suspicion upon himself. The position and power of the supposed murderer confuse not the avenger Laertes. A mere rumour, whisperers and calumniators are his sources, not 'an honest ghost,' risen from the earth. He has not the power nor the means which Hamlet has, but those which he has he will 'husband so well, that they shall go far with little.' He is not the lawful heir to the throne, he is not in the sight and favour of the people, not a prince of the house royal; but *he*, the subject, creates 'a rebellion which looks giant-like,' and shakes the king upon his throne. Pressing into the presence of the king, he curses the drop of blood that's calm in him, because it proclaims shame to his father and to himself as an unnatural son. He dooms his allegiance to hell, he sends conscience and grace to the profoundest pit, he dares damnation, whilst Hamlet speculates doubtfully in the sunlight. He would cut the throat of his father's murderer 'i' the church' (and the king himself approves of this, because 'no place, indeed, should murder sanctuarise'), whilst Hamlet, with pious scruples concerning this very king, passed him by as he was praying. Laertes goes so far as to poison his sword, that in single combat with Hamlet he may more surely obtain his end. He sullies by this his knightly honour, although he treats his revenge rather as a matter of honour, while for Hamlet it is a heavy matter of conscience. But in the midst of this passion, strained even to unscrupulousness, he is strictly confined to the one object of his revenge, whilst, owing to Hamlet's tardy steps, the guiltless Polonius falls, Ophelia becomes crazed, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are made a sacrifice, and himself and his mother perish. The king need not have addressed to Laertes those exhortations (Act IV. sc. 7), which were more calculated for Hamlet:—

That we would do,
ould do when we would; for this *would* changes,
hath abatements and delays as many
s there are tongues, are hands, are accidents.

he need just as little have warned him of the assaults of his rage against the innocent; the man of just passion surpasses in moderation the subtle arts of the avenger, and wisdom speaks from the desperate warrior, whom arrogance and success might have dazzled. He will open wide his arms to the friends of his father, and 'like the kind life-rend'ring pelican, repast them with his blood.' He desires alone to meet the murderer of his father, he has only this one object before him, and he expresses it in the first moment in which he appears before Claudius, in the short and sharp inquiry for his father; in this one endeavour not all the will of the world shall stay him.

And all this for what a father! Of Hamlet's father we hear those proud often-quoted words, the most splendid epithet of a great man:—

> He was a man, take him for all in all,
> I shall not look upon his like again.

What a contrast to this is Polonius! The exact design of this contrast can never have been perceived by those who endeavoured to place this character in a favourable light, an endeavour which is not worth refutation. If Polonius' bad and ridiculous qualities had been even partially concealed by his good ones, why should Hamlet enjoin the players, when he commits them to *him*, the father of his beloved, to 'mock him not'? Why should he say, in the presence of his daughter, that her father is a fool? Why should he call him a tedious old fool? Why, moreover, should he say over his corpse, that he was 'in all his life a foolish prating knave'? We see him commit no especial acts of knavery, but we see him in a service and employ by no means over-honourable; he has an unwearied predilection for crooked ways, for aside-thrusts, and for eavesdropping, and at length he falls a sacrifice to them; he meddles with everything, and gains a scent of his son's doings and actings even in Paris, not so careful for the virtue as for the outward behaviour of his children, neither of whom he trusts. The man hunts out everything, and binds himself, 'if circumstances lead him,' to find where truth is hid, 'though it were hid indeed within the centre;' but he has never surmised the transactions at the

death of the old Hamlet and the marriage of his widow
he has, like a genuine courtier he has had neither feeli
opinion on the matter. It is just such company as this t
king like Claudius requires; upon state affairs he asks
nothing, but he hears him greedily on domestic matter
willingly accepts his empty eloquence, and excuses his confi
dence of opinion. Arrived at a ripe age, the schooled courtie
lacks not experience and observation, which he has carefully
gathered and loquaciously gives forth; the self-conceit of empti-
ness is apparent in him, and with the same self-sufficiency he
gives good precepts to his son, a lesson on human nature to his
servant, and counsels to his king. In his fa iness
he considers himself a man of wisdom and grea
and he builds with confidence upon the infalli
We all know the insolence of the self-complacen
who, even in the face of events which give th
prophecies, declares that he had anticipated everyt
has come to pass; we all know the fool with a good m
for wise sayings; and the eloquent man who speaks with greater
wisdom than he possesses, until unawares he betrays more of
his folly and ignorance than he wished. Such a man is Polonius.
It costs him nothing to tell the lie that will reflect upon him-
self the acuteness of having perceived Hamlet's love for
Ophelia before he was told of it. He then accurately sees
through the gradual progress of the madness of Hamlet, who is
perfectly in his senses. He wishes to understand everything,
to be acquainted with everything, to have been everything:
a clever actor—a designation which suggest reflections similar
to those of Hamlet; a madman suffering, like Hamlet, 'much
extremity for love,' from which we may gather the fact that he
was an old sinner. He seeks to stand well with all, for, however
positive he may be, he yields equally readily to the opinions of
others; and if people ridicule him, he affects, says Goethe, not
to observe it; one would rather believe that for the most part
he actually does not observe it. In this manner he gets on
with everyone except with Hamlet; in the presence of this
deeper nature, which lies quite beyond his reach, he is helpless;
the simpleton then always comes to light, although he esteems
the prince to be a madman. Hamlet also is just as little able
to accommodate himself to him. He hates too thoroughly the
shallowness and falsehood of the character
his aversion, even where

ve demanded it from the lover of Ophelia towards the
er of the father, or towards the father of the daughter.
this is the man to avenge whose death Laertes hazards
h the worlds,' while Hamlet forgets the hero who rises from
e grave for his admonition.

Thus, then, the structure of the play stands in perfect unity and connection before us; the action throughout has one point in view, and the least conspicuous figures are in close and essential relation to the main subject. The truth-loving, moral hero stands in the midst of those wandering on crooked ways of hypocrisy, dissimulation, and untruth; his sensible, conscientious [illegible] nspect nature is opposed in strong contrast to the luct of all the others, and to the heartless or essness of their actions and their consequences; queen, Polonius and Ophelia, even all the subor- es (with the exception of Horatio, who only observes acts), Fortinbras, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and even all fall more or less under this aspect; and the character of Laertes, the express contrast to Hamlet, is delineated with peculiar force and delicacy; in the attainment of his object he is more severely conscientious than Hamlet, but unscrupulous in his means, and this excellently prevents the subordinate hero from rising too highly in our interest. Yet, however well this whole action and its inner connection is designed and accomplished, we feel in no play more than in this that which we before alleged of the Merchant of Venice: that with Shakespeare the action is ever secondary, that it ever holds a subordinate place, and that the true point of unity in his works ever leads to the source of the actions, to the actors themselves, and to the hidden grounds from which their actions spring. We could take but little interest for its own sake in the negative action of this play, in the evasion of the deed, in the lack of outward events, and in the absence of inward energy and vigour. Yet we take the deepest interest in this Hamlet—proof sufficient that the especial charm lies in the character. When we have thoroughly penetrated it, we may then feel that we have dived to the ground of the action. And not this alone; in our acquaintance with this source of the action we feel we have attained at once to an incomparably richer and more fertile perception; we can imagine this highly endowed man under other [illegible] ent and yet ever the same; we learn to [illegible] t, as mer[illegible]

deep original spring, from which can be traced the tide of similar or different actions; and we perceive the moral deduced from the story only as a lesson that may be traced to a higher, more comprehensive truth. It remains with us then to examine what form of character this is, what were the elements of its origin, and what pursuits and peculiarities affect this nature and render it so irresolute and incapable of action.

His mother depicts Hamlet, as to his appearance, as 'fat and scant of breath;' thus Burbage represented him, and not in that common youthful elegance in which we are accustomed to see him portrayed since Garrick's time, which is even more repugnant to the higher conception of this character than the representation of the 'smiling villain' Claudius as a gloomy, thick-bearded tyrant. In accordance with this intimation of his mother's, Hamlet says himself that his uncle is no more like his father than he to Hercules. He lacked, therefore, says Goethe, the external strength of the hero, or we might say, more simply, the strength of a practical and active nature. His temperament is quiet, calm, phlegmatic, and free from choler; his mother, in an expressive image, compares his patient repose to that of the turtle-dove sitting over her 'golden couplets.' In violent passion with Laertes, Hamlet says of himself that he is not 'splenetive and rash,' yet he has in him something dangerous, which the wisdom of his enemy may fear. This 'something dangerous' is his sensitive excitability, which originates in a heated imagination, and which supplies this passive nature with a goad for defence and a weapon for assault, but only at a moment of extreme necessity. For this very imagination is the source also of Hamlet's faintheartedness, and of his anxious uneasiness and weakness; it is a psychological circle, only too often verified by human nature. From this one source there springs among whole nations, as Montesquieu has observed—among the old Iberians and Indians for instance—the same mixture of mildness combined with exaggerated energy under provocation; the sensitiveness of their organisation, which causes them to fear death; causes them to fear a thousand things still more than death, the same susceptibility leads them to flee from danger, and to scorn it when compelled to face it. Thus is it with Hamlet. His busy imagination suggests to him a condition with its fearful and remotest results; he sees himself surrounded by dangers and snares, and seeks to obviate them with elaborate preparation. He believes in ghosts and there-

fore sees them; differing in this from his more rational friend Horatio, who hardly believes, after he has seen it, that 'the thing' is the ghost of Hamlet; who in its very presence calls it an 'illusion,' and attempts to strike it with his partisan; who, according to his own confession, believes the traditions of Christian superstition only 'in part,' and according to his tone not at all. When the ghost appears to Hamlet, when his 'fate cries out,' in the excitement of the moment he fears not death, and 'each petty artery' in his body is 'as hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve;' but then too, according to Horatio's expression, he is 'desperate with imagination.' After the play, in the 'witching time of night,' when his imagination is heated, he could 'drink hot blood, and do such business as the bitter day would quake to look on;' then it seems to him as if the soul of Nero could enter his bosom; he sharpens the edge of his revenge, and when in this over-excited mood the occasion surprises him, and no time is left for consideration and doubt, he shows himself capable of the deed from which, in a calmer state, recollections and scruples restrain him. Nor is this excitement suddenly quieted by the disappointment of his mistaken vengeance; he torments his mother in the violence of his emotion more than his father permitted him; he speaks bitter words over the corpse of Polonius, and only subsequently weeps over it; the patience of the dove then comes sorrowfully back to him. So, too, when surprised by the tidings of Ophelia's death, he hears Laertes' ostentatious lamentation over her grave, a storm of passion rises within him, and finds vent in a burst of exaggerated language. By this excess of excitement Hamlet blunts the edge of purpose and action, which is rendered dull by the habitual tardiness of his nature; he alternately touches the chords of the two different moral themes of the drama, namely, that intentions conceived in passion vanish with the emotion, and that human will changes, and is influenced and enfeebled by delays. These waverings of his nature, this alternate inertness and passion, indolence and excitement, Hamlet perceives in himself, with all the torments, faults, and results which belong to them; nothing is, therefore, more natural than that his soul, as soon as she 'could of men distinguish her election,' should have sealed the noble Horatio for herself, in whose contrary character she might find support and edification. Horatio is indeed just as little an energetic character as Hamlet; such a one as Fortinbras would be too dissimilar for his friendship; but Horatio is

a man of perfect calmness of mind, schooled to bear suffering and to take with equal thanks fortune's buffets and rewards; he is a hero of endurance, one of those blessed ones on whom Hamlet might look with envy,

> Whose blood and judgment are so well co-mingled,
> That they are not a gripe for fortune's finger
> To sound what stop she please,

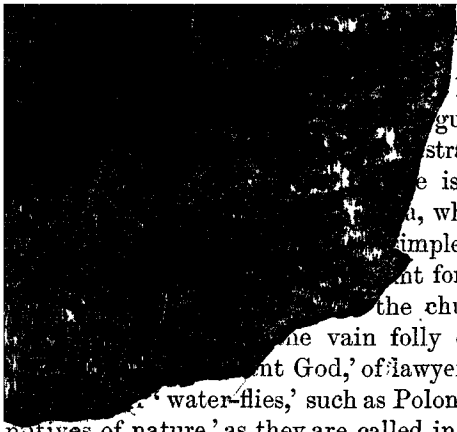
nor are they the resistless slaves of passion.

This same elasticity in Hamlet's nature, which leads him from supineness to passion, and from vehemence to apathy, shows itself also in the contrast of good and bad temper, of spleen and humour, and in the balance of the sanguine with the melancholy side of his temperament. The poet has placed in close context with these witty satirical traits, which allow us to perceive in Hamlet a merry and happy nature, those of an elegiac sentimental character, which exhibit him a prey to deep melancholy; these affect his humour, scarcely alternately but by being blended together, and the results are those bitter sarcasms which form his usual manner of expression. In prosperity the cheerful side of Hamlet's nature would have been developed; his predisposition to melancholy would then only have borne a contemplative character; he would perhaps have always visited churchyards and solitary places, and have given way to tender moods and emotions, but this inclination would never have degenerated into a melancholy that amounts to despair. The cause of this extremity of dejection lies in the events which befall him, events which suddenly impoverish him, which rob him, as Goethe says, of the true conception he had formed of his parents, which unhinge his mind and roll upon him a tide of affliction, sorrow, uneasiness, and dire forebodings, which in the course of their fulfilment produce unrestrained derangement. From the unfortified manner with which he bears misfortune, we should conclude that he was a man created rather for happiness, whose distinguishing quality would then have been a witty cheerfulness and lightheartedness; this appears in him innate as well as acquired. He shows himself one of those ready and witty orators according to the taste of the age, more skilful in playing a part in comedy than in tragedy; the acuteness of mind which enables him to assume his tragic madness would *under brighter* circumstances have involuntarily taken a comic aspect. As a child he had hung on the lips of the jester

Yorick; we see him employed even now in the midst of his sorrow in reading satires; he is ready to quibble with men of every degree according to their fashion; the humorous jest, the play of wit and word, has become habit and second nature to him; in the midst of his depressed condition, in his solemn mourning and dejected visage, he amuses himself with the absurdities of his assumed madness. Just because these have become a habit with him, his jests and play of words mingle involuntarily with his agitated tragic moods, and the actor has to guard against nothing more than laying stress upon them and provoking laughter, or attempting glaring alternations of mirth and melancholy. He would indeed have the merriment of the pit on his side, but he would excite the sadness of the more intelligent, who take no pleasure in this want of harmony but prefer the consistent exhibition of the poet's meaning. Humorous and sarcastic images, comparisons and allusions escape from Hamlet with unconscious readiness in the midst of his excitement. The strangeness of this mode of expression in the oath scene ought not for a moment to disturb the pervading horror, nor in the churchyard scene to interfere with the tone of the most touching sadness. With the deepest sorrow for his father's death and his mother's fickleness mingle bitter words which must penetrate the soul, although the same expressions under other circumstances would only excite cheerful laughter. As in Richard II.'s sorrow and misfortune, his mirth in time of prosperity could be inferred, so it is with Hamlet; also Gonzago's words suit both: 'Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament.' The acuteness of his wit as of his sorrow is therefore with Hamlet the uniform expression of his characteristic habit of mind, which from misfortune is led to speculate upon the darkest aspect of things, while under ordinary circumstances it would have exhibited itself in sparkling repartee and witty rejoinder. With regard to this two-sided disposition and nature, nay, indeed, in other essential respects also, Hamlet may be regarded as a kind of counter picture to Prince Henry. To the latter also the trait of despondency and melancholy was no stranger; at the sickness and death of his father it became evident enough in his nature. But his fortunes and his propensities were not favourable to this bias; he pursues his cheerful way through life until he becomes aware of the solemn grandeur of his vocation; he then exhibits the calm equanimity and the well-balanced qualities which fit their owner for the most ex-

alted business of life. So
no stranger to Hamlet; we
and similar circumstances w
equally opposed to conventio
yet his bearing would have
brighter aspect of things. Ph
diffident, more reserved nature
terous society of the prince a
almost womanly way he would not hav
the prince's youthful misdemeanours; but
he never attained to his manly virtues. Our com
Hamlet, as of Prince Henry, is that on a higher scale he was one of Shakespeare's humorous characters, suddenly influenced by the solemn demands of the realities of life. We see in him a new modification of these characters. To those who proved themselves valiant and matured under such circumstances, or who ripened by degrees, to Prince Henry who surpassed all expectations at this moment of emergency, is now added Hamlet, who falls short of the royal hopes to which he bids fair; who is ill-prepared for the mission which falls to his lot, and who perishes in it by a tragic end.

In harmony with what we have seen of Hamlet's appearance, temperament, and natural disposition, are the rich endowments of mind and morals with which the poet has invested him. His uncle himself designates the kindly man as of a nature 'sweet and commendable;' all gentle virtues, all tender and delicate feelings belong to him. His childlike piety is that which at once strikes us most forcibly. The reverence with which he reflects on his deceased father is unbounded; the sorrow which he endures for him testifies to the greatest warmth and sincerity of feeling; his grief at his mother's fickleness causes a shock to his whole moral nature; the certainty of his uncle's crime completely overwhelms him. The heaviness of this sorrow may indeed partly result from the innate susceptibility peculiar to Hamlet's nature; he has a kind of delight in dwelling upon gloomy ideas, and in revelling in thoughts of suicide and death. Yet the shock to his moral sensibilities adds essentially to the burden of his grief; and well may he call his indignation 'virtue,' when he gives it vent in the scene in which, with an ethical invective of the highest power, he urges his mother to confession and repentance. In great traits he is throughout placed before us, as a moral nature endowed



leaves the common high-
guided by principle. The
straints of conventionality;
e is the friend of the poor
, who is far beneath him in
imple natural habits which is
nt for his aversion to all mean
the churchyard he expresses his
e vain folly of women, of politicians
nt God,' of lawyers and courtiers; towards
'water-flies,' such as Polonius and Osric, the 'dimi-
nutives of nature,' as they are called in Troilus, he manifests his intense antipathy or sarcastic contempt. The often-admired scene in which he ridicules the young Osric, a man with all the gloss of superficial culture, who, an accomplice in Laertes' scheme, challenges Hamlet to the fatal fight with the same polite formalities as, to use Hamlet's words, 'he did comply with his dug, before he sucked it,' is a scene highly expressive of Hamlet's character. It places him in glaring contrast to this 'breed' of people on whom 'the drossy age dotes,' who get 'the tune of the time and outward habit of encounter,' without the reality of true culture; who have gathered 'a kind of yesty collection, which carries them through and through the most fan'd and winnowed opinions,' until a point of trial is met, where their wit vanishes and 'the bubbles are out.' As Hamlet here appears opposed to the false culture of the age, he is equally vehement against its lack of refinement. He will know nothing of the brawls and revels of the generation; the intemperance of his uncle, the quarrels of Fortinbras, are far from his nature. Thus in the task assigned to him an inner conflict perplexes him; the strife of a higher law with the natural law of vengeance, the struggle of fine moral feelings with the instinct of nature. His irresolution results in nowise exclusively from weakness, but essentially also from conscientiousness and virtue; and it is just this subtle combination which renders Hamlet such an essentially tragic character. His doubts as to the certainty of the fact and the legitimacy of revenge, the gentleness of his soul which unconsciously struggles against the means of vengeance, the bent of his mind to reflect upon the nature and consequences of his deed and by this means to paralyse his active powers, all these scruples 'of thinking

too precisely on the event,' he himself calls, in the warmth of self-blame,

> A thought, which quartered, hath but one part wisdom,
> And ever three parts coward;

but the poet has so well balanced the combination, that, in spite of Hamlet's witness against himself, we are inclined to impute the half at least to wisdom. As an excess of feeling and love deprives Romeo of reflection and thought, and thus prepares a violent end to his unbridled joy, so Hamlet is robbed of his power of action by an excess of conscientiousness, gentleness, and sorrowing melancholy;

> For goodness, growing to a plurisy
> Dies in his own too-much;

here and there

> The violence of either grief or joy,
> Their own enactures with themselves destroy.

Refined in morals, richly endowed with feeling, Hamlet is pre-eminent also in intellectual gifts and culture; he possesses a contemplative mind, a deep inner experience and observation, and he is, according to Ophelia, 'of noble and most sovereign reason; the observed of all observers.' Regarded from this side Hamlet's character is that of a man of genius; the soliloquies of this 'prince of speculative philosophy' are masterpieces of reflection, in which Shakespeare had recourse to the most profound depths of his wisdom; and the intricacies of his subtle thoughts mock the profundity of Scandinavian mysteries. He is essentially a man of letters, he carries memorandum-books with him; allusions to his reading are ready to him; in advanced years he was still at the university, and longs to return there; not like Laertes at Paris, but at Wittenberg, a name honoured by the Protestant hearts of England; no royal ambition urges him to the society of his equals; his associate is the scholar Horatio, the friend of his school-days and his fellow-student. We become acquainted with Hamlet as the friend and judge of acting, as a poet and a player. He has seen the players before and has had closer intercourse with them; he inserts a passage in the piece they are playing; he declaims before them, and gives them instructions. His praise of the fragment of Pyrrhus, sustained in the old Seneca-like style, is perfectly serious; it distinguishes him from Polonius, whom a

jig pleases better; this, as well as his instructions to the players, exhibits him as a man of cultivated mind and taste, as a judge whose single appreciation is worth more than that of all the rest of the theatre. It is, therefore, natural that the idea should occur to him of 'catching' the king's conscience in a play; he seeks, as it were, an ingenious revenge; and to accomplish this, under the touching effect of the presence of his conscience-stricken mother, had evidently a kind of theatrical charm for him. When this trial of the king by means of the play succeeds, it is characteristic of Hamlet that it is not the fearful evidence of the crime which occupies him at first, but the pleasure in his skill as actor or poet; it is not the result so much as the art which has effected it. 'Would not this,' are his first words, 'get me a fellowship in a cry of players?' This question, still more than the performance itself, would certainly appear to mark his aptitude for the position. It is from this same inclination of Hamlet's, as much as from his character, that he adopts the strangely indirect course of feigning himself mad, and that he is able to sustain his part naturally and ingeniously. He had the power of disguising himself artfully and artistically, and of skilfully remaining his own master behind the mask, averse as he is to dissimulation in life. Immediately after the departure of the ghost, still agitated by the apparition, he receives his friends with a falcon-call as if in the most joyful mood, and knows how to conceal his emotion at first as well as his secret at last. To imagine himself in the position of the player, and on all occasions to study 'the word,' is a natural trait resulting from his intellectual life and pursuits. He goes with a kind of joyful preparation to rouse his mother's conscience by a moral lecture and a flood of impressive eloquence, to speak daggers rather than to use them, while he neglects the deed of vengeance, which would of itself have gained his object; when Laertes bursts forth in the bombastic outpouring of his brotherly grief, he receives it as a challenge for a war of words. Hamlet is aware of the fault in himself, he recognises it as a hindrance to his active emotion, and blames it in himself with the same vehemence as he declaims against the conscientiousness of his cowardice and the cowardice of his conscience. The soliloquy (Act II. sc. 2) after his first interview with the players is in this respect expressive even to ultra-distinctness. After assailing himself with every slanderous name, in order to stir up his stagnant passion, he calls himself 'unpregnant of his

cause,' because he can—*do* nothing, we should expect, but he merely adds, 'because he can *say* nothing;' for his first desire, like the actor in playing a scene, would be to

> drown the stage with tears,
> And cleave the general ear with horrid speech;
> Make mad the guilty,

as he subsequently does in his interview with his mother. Then follows a fresh flood of invectives; he applies to himself the deafening volleys of his eloquence; he surprises himself in the midst of his boasting, and turns upon himself fresh words of scorn:—

> Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave;
> That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
> Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
> Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
> And fall a cursing, like a very drab,
> A scullion!

He deprecates this digression, and rouses himself to action. 'About,' he cries out—my *hands*! we should expect it, but, 'my *brains*!' are his words. And then he devises the play, which is to be a fresh prelude to his vengeance. Thus, from natural impulse and habit, the mind of this man of deep reflection is unconsciously the overruling agent in everything; thought has become with him the measure of things. Shakespeare invests him with a philosophical principle, which contains a most characteristic modification of the poet's own worldly wisdom. That virtue and vice, good and bad actions, acquire their real importance from the circumstances, aims, and natural characters of men, that it is not the *what* but the *how* that decides the value of an action, is a maxim of Shakespearian experience, which is too frequently and too forcibly repeated in word and example for the poet not to have well weighed every word which he wrote in this sense. This maxim is thus modified in Hamlet's lips: 'There is nothing either good or bad, but *thinking* makes it so.'

In this maxim lies the origin of all the doubts which perplex Hamlet upon the duty of revenge, and which would make him tremble and delay at every weighty call to action. This revenge is not in itself determined as a good or a bad action on the part of Hamlet; but the *circumstances* render it, according to Shakespeare's representation, a duty on the part of the lawful

king and judge of the country, a just act of punishment for an open crime, an easier task and a better cause than that of Laertes. But 'thinking' renders this very duty a matter of doubt and difficulty to Hamlet. The 'thinking too precisely on the event' excites at first the moral scruple of being unscrupulous and over-hasty, and then awakens prudence and precaution in proceeding circumspectly to the performance of the work. The phlegmatic nature of the man causes that in both, conscientiousness and foresight, too much is done—for his mission and action nothing. His mental acuteness sees through this defect in his nature, and half with envy, half with esteem, he acknowledges the able qualities of Laertes and Fortinbras; his just acknowledgment of that which invests men with worth and esteem causes him to reproach himself vehemently for his deficiencies, even to a pitch of passionate excitement; he urges himself to a passing ardour in which he casts aside his hindering considerations, but he has once for ever lost the sure instinct of action, and at last, at the moment of the deed, he makes a mistake. For passing irritability can just as little as hesitating deliberation make a man of action; earnest persistency and constancy are alone necessary, because any comprehensive action of important consequences is not to be accomplished hastily, but only by time. After he has erred in the murder of Polonius in a manner so important in its results, Hamlet loses himself in a kind of fatalism which weakens him entirely. He forms the conviction that all consideration avails nothing, that our deepest plots do pall, that we can only rough-hew our ends, that providence shapes them as he will. This opinion his *thoughts* have formed, and he conveniently uses it to render himself still more averse to independent activity. He forgets that it was not a rough but a too ingenious and too subtle scheme of revenge which had been frustrated; more and more sluggishly he lets his vocation drop. From this, his incapability for action, Hamlet is convinced by self-knowledge and experience; *before* both, indeed, he is oppressed to the earth by the dim and instinctive feeling of this peculiarity of his nature. Before the call for vengeance has reached him, and after it has sounded, life weighs upon him like an insufferable burden, and this urges him in his reflections to the very limits of suicide. From fear of a possible crime and of an unwarranted revenge his thoughts pass to the certain crime of suicide, against which the Everlasting has fixed his canon.

But from this deed also, which he would fain commit in order that he might escape the deed required of him, the same consideration of the issue restrains him; he is not free-minded enough to do violence to his conscience which prohibits suicide, nor to the reflection of what may follow after death. If he were sure of the eternal sleep, this would be an aim most heartily to be desired. But when he thinks on possible dreams, on a life in which he might be again called to action, then he stands wavering between two worlds, not qualified for life nor for death. The same cowardly reflection and conscientiousness urge him from this point to that, and back again from that to this. Thus it must be admitted that in that famed soliloquy, 'to be or not to be,' this character, as every reader must feel, at its height, and the idea of the play reaches its central point in that sentence in which moral and intellectual considerations, conscience and thought, are regarded as drags upon the power of action:—

> Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
> And thus the native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;
> And enterprises of great pith and moment,
> With this regard, their currents turn awry,
> And lose the name of action.

Shakespeare, in his perfect worldly wisdom, advocates an active apprehension of life, and he was deeply conscious that the one-sided fostering of head and heart crippled the effective power of the man. Cutting sentences in Troilus utter this in scornful words; that subtle reasoning upon the demands of action is to 'shut our pates and sleep;' that

> manhood and honour
> Should have hare-hearts, would they but fat their thoughts
> With this cramm'd reason;

that

> reason and respect
> Make livers pale, and lustihood deject.

Here, in Hamlet, the poet has expressly undertaken the splendid task of depicting the immense gap between a sense of duty and its fulfilment, between willing and doing, between discernment and resolve, between resolve and action. He is occupied in developing the relation of a fine soul to a great character, of a sensitive and intelligent nature to a practical one, of intel

lectual strength to power of action. He shows us how, by the one-sided training of the mind, the active side of our nature is crippled and fettered; how the finest cultivation of the heart is fruitless for energy when the discipline of the will is neglected; how, being absorbed by the world within, we are alienated and diverted from that without, giving reality to shadows, and casting a cloud over the actual; how the hand which is least occupied possesses the more tender feeling, but how, on the contrary, the tenderer feeling necessarily effeminates the hand; how hard the transition may be from the noblest principles to real action; how the best qualities without the due cultivation of the mental, social, and active powers fail in perfect value, and miss their aim at last; how, without this harmony of all points of the human being, the noblest mind (to use Ophelia's expression) is overthrown, a bell out of tune, though designed in the finest mould. Thus noble in nature has Shakespeare designed his Hamlet. He has endowed him with all great gifts of heart and mind: if we take hold of this side of the character we are captivated by his amiable qualities, and are tempted to believe that the poet intended to magnify this inner life of man above the outer one of action; for he has placed the figures of this opposite colouring, Laertes and Fortinbras, very much in the background compared with Hamlet. If we do not look out for the shadow-side of his hero, if we do not take into consideration his tragic end, if we did not remember those grand forms of Henry and Percy, we might strengthen ourselves in this belief; as it is, we only perceive that the poet knows how to honour one side of human nature as much as the other; we see again another and greater instance of his wonderful, impartial, and many-sided interest in all the qualities which belong to man. He places Hamlet at the highest point of mental gifts and moral effort, without being blind to the faults or deficiencies of his qualities and education, which detract so much from his worth and his virtues. The delight with which he evidently dwells upon this character becomes on this account all the more agreeable, because it makes us sensible in the poet of the condescension of a superior, and not of the sympathy of an equal. For in his sight the very quality, it must be admitted, which is lacking in Hamlet alone gives man his true value. Filled with the conviction that active life is the only real life, he has depicted his Henry and Percy with such glad preference; and in the same

way this poem of Hamlet is also only a eulogy and a glorification of the active nature from a picture of the contrary. With a mental nature rich in fancy and full of soul, born rather for feeling than acting, more for thinking than doing, more as an artist and scholar than as a hero, warrior, or statesman, Hamlet with his superior mind has discovered the true principle of life, the noblest which Shakespeare has perhaps ever pronounced, and which he has pronounced alone for noble men in that before-quoted passage:—

> Rightly to be great,
> Is not to stir without great argument;
> But greatly to find quarrel in a straw,
> When honour's at the stake.'

But Hamlet, a master in intelligence, can only *utter* this principle; he cannot *carry it out*, as that Henry did, who is a master in life and action. He has the 'excitements of his reason and his blood' for a great task; with him not alone honour, but even right, law, his own safety, and his life, are at stake; but the self-created doubts of reason have destroyed in him the impulse of the blood, his mind has marred his instinct, the genuine spring of certain action. He falls short of this ambition and of that stimulating self-reliance, qualities bestowed on those heroes of arms as the mainspring of their deeds. He accuses himself indeed, before Ophelia, of pride, revenge, and ambition, but he possesses none of the three. Much rather does that sigh proceed from his innermost nature, when he says to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who in their turn imagined him to be ambitious, 'I could be pounded in a nut-shell, and count myself a king of infinite space.' He is, we see, as far from the nature of a Hercules as from that of an Alexander, who found the world too small a scope for him. The deprivation of his succession to the throne provokes him not to kingly ambition, nor the desire for war in a Fortinbras to that fame-coveting rivalry, which made such heroic natures of Percy and Henry; at the most, a little envy and jealousy of Laertes' fencing talent is excited in him. In Hamlet a social character of modern times is, as it were, depicted, one which is inclined to abandon the heroic customs of the age in which fate has placed him, of an age in which everything hinges upon physical power and the desire for action, which nature has denied to *him*. All the bloody unnatural events which we see before us—

adultery, poisoning, and revenge for bloodshed, and the warlike deeds on which we cast a glance, the combat between the old Hamlet and Norway, when 'he smote the sledded Polack on the ice'—all this transports us to a rude and wild period, from which Hamlet's whole nature recoils, and to which he falls a sacrifice, because, by habit, character, and education, he is alienated from it, and like the boundary-stone of a changing civilisation he touches a world of finer feeling. His is a more tender nervous frame than that of the natures which surround him; he is invested with a knowledge and a power of thought which accord not with the muscular strength of the old heroic age; a sensibility and delicacy of feeling is his inheritance, only realised centuries after the poet's life. Our modern sensibility is anticipated, as it were, by two centuries in Hamlet. The words, 'Alas, poor Yorick!' which Hamlet utters in the churchyard with bitter tears, in the superabundant emotion of his soul, have become a sort of fruitful source of those tender and gentle moods which in the last century spread like an epidemic in England and Germany. Sterne, prompted by these words, wrote his (Yorick's) 'Sentimental Journey,' and this book operated like the opening of a sluice, letting loose the whole stream of sensibility, which at that time poured like a flood over the Germanic lands.

In this anticipation there lies on the side of the poet a true greatness; there is no doubt that in this deep sensibility, as well as in the high intelligence with which he invested Hamlet, very few of his contemporaries could follow him. The honour of being in advance of the age is in most cases only equivocal. A man should belong to his age, and the work which lies nearest he should advance according to his ability. Anticipating time, moreover, is only too often the incapability of idealistic enthusiasts to bear the actual. It is only when a man, such as Shakespeare, entirely and fully belongs first to his age and its cultivation and business in every essential direction, and also by his power of mind anticipates the method of thought and feeling in generations to come, that we can respect this advanced position as the token of a true and great superiority. If on the other hand we apply this verdict to our present play, if we look upon Hamlet as holding a similar advanced position in relation to his age, the view is at once changed. We have shown that he may be considered as such an anticipator of his time, withdrawing from the rude but vigorous habits of an

heroic age, and we shall see in Macbeth that this point of view was not foreign to Shakespeare himself. But Hamlet presents himself to us, not as one who satisfied the customs and demands of his time, but as one who fell far short of their nearest claims, in spite of his capacity for meeting their larger and more remote requirements. He appears to us as an idealist, unequal to the real world, and who, repelled by it, not only laments in elegiac strains over its deficiencies and defects, but grows embittered and sickly about it, even to the injury of his naturally noble character. If Hamlet, as regards his sensibility, is an anticipation of the feeble generation of the last century, he is, as regards this bitterness of feeling, a type of our German race at the present day. And this it is which has made Hamlet the most known of all Shakespeare's plays, and the most discussed among us for now nearly a hundred years; it is because the conditions of the soul which are here depicted seem to us the most expressive and the most living. We feel and see our own selves in him, and, in love with our own deficiencies, we have long seen only the bright side of this character, until of late we have had a glimpse of its shadows also. We look upon the mirror of our present state as if this work had first been written in our own day; the poet, like a living man, works for us and in us in the same way as he intended to do for his own age. So deep and true is this poet's observation of nature, so great is the similarity of nature and its effects generally and individually, that the comparison between a people and an individual of entirely different times, such as we here only suggest, could be easily carried on much further than for the sake of brevity we can allow ourselves to do.

The portrait which we Germans see before us in this mirror is similar enough to alarm us. It is not I alone who have expressed this; it has been remarked and experienced by thousands. A poem by one of our present political poets begins with the words, 'Hamlet is Germany.' And this declaration is no ingenious play of words or confused ideas. For, just like Hamlet, we have been placed, up to the present day, between an approaching task of a purely practical nature and a customary desuetude to work and action. Just like him we have been deeply absorbed with the occupation of the mind and the cultivation of the heart, even to a forgetfulness of the world without; as with him Wittenberg and its bequests have lain nearer to our hearts than warlike struggles for honour and

power; like Hamlet our life has been filled up with poems and dramas, and to act the task of the time on the stage, to amuse ourselves with words and with the show of heroism, has pleased us better than a composed and steady preparation for the seriousness of the age. Did not the spirits of our forefathers approach us warningly in those early days of our political elevation from the French yoke, and rejoice over our quick resolve? But we soon allowed our ardour to drop, and in fleeting petty paroxysms of passion we let our wings hang weary in dove-like patience. Examples, gross as earth, exhorted us also and spurred us on, but we left them unheeded. Just like Hamlet we lost delight in our existence, and fled from the real world to the kingdom of the ideal;—we injured the sure tact of instinctive life by over-exercise of the mind, by reflection, and by the constant recognition of the actual in our whims and fancies. Just so we grew sceptically embittered against the world, life, and mankind; endowed with such qualities for esteeming human worth, we excited ourselves into misanthropy, and with such a vocation for active service in the world, we indulged in a passive universal sorrow (*Weltschmerz*). Have we not all, in the soliloquies of our literature, felt proud of the achievements of our mind, and found man so like a god, so noble in reason, so infinite in faculties, and yet like Hamlet have had no delight in him? May not all who are enduring this 'universal sorrow' and all the 'weary ones of Europe' (*Europamüden*) discover their own striking picture in the man who bore with such impatient heart

> the whips and scorns of time,
> The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
> . . . . . the law's delay,
> The insolence of office, and the spurns
> That patient merit of the unworthy takes?

Are their embittered feelings anything but the echo alone of that sickly melancholy with which Hamlet regards the world as a prison, the earth as 'an unweeded garden,' 'a steril promontory,' air and firmament as a pestilent congregation of vapours, the age as drossy and narrow, and all in it as tedious, shallow, dull, and useless, uttering over it all an exclamation of the profoundest disgust? And yet more. In thus destroying our souls by loathing the world, have we not, like Hamlet, wholly forgotten the near for the distant? We have thought

ourselves individually obliged to bear the affliction of the universe, to become its saviour and deliverer, without thinking of ourselves individually. Each has uttered with Hamlet his lament that the time was out of joint, and each has thought himself called upon to set it right. It is hard to make the dull-minded sensible of the fact, though the intelligent feels it for himself, that in this sentence lay the basis of Hamlet's ruin as well as of our own! For thus we too imagine that our vocation in literature and politics lies in the far distance and in some unknown great event; and for this reason we delay and forget to do that which falls to our lot and is our nearest task. Hamlet had a near and easy vocation to fulfil, he had to set right a little world; if this, however, were too hard for him, the task assigned to him was, in the first place, to put himself in joint and to become his own reformer. This he saw not. And thousands of reformers among us are in the same case. Like Hamlet, the vexation caused by petty experiences is extended by them to the whole race of mankind, and they exchange their near vocation for one utterly remote; excessive egotism, a fruit fostered so easily by a purely intellectual life, makes them refer all to themselves, as if each one were the champion of the world, and yet notwithstanding it makes them incapable of satisfying any demands. When this weakness becomes conscious of itself, self-contempt rises against it, and Hamlet scorns himself, that such fellows as he should crawl between earth and heaven. This trait, also, has not unfrequently been betrayed by the representatives of our German life in literature and politics; they stand in the clearest light of self-knowledge, just as Hamlet does, without being in the slightest degree thus influenced to a change. And the point of highest similarity between our public character and Hamlet's is this: that however noble and ideal may be everything which we had exhibited in word and demeanour hitherto, at the first point of transition from principle to action our national nature suddenly appeared injured and cankered. The moment of action surprised us unexpectedly; we entered upon it in the exaggeration of passionate ardour, and missed the aim which we had not wisely measured. By such conduct the unsatisfactory change in the national character stepped suddenly to light. The line of conduct which at the time of the first great rise to outward and inward freedom had been honest, true, open, genuine, and good-natured, at the period of a subsequent effort took secret paths, and appeared

faithless, perjured, destitute of all honour, and deprived of all good. When the heroes of word were called at last to that work and action, about which they had so long protested, the poison within burst forth in loathsome corruption, and cruelty, revenge, bloodthirstiness, and assassination stained the German name, while no one in the prime of mental culture and domestic morality had divined in us such glaring unruliness.

Thus, too, in Hamlet, to return to him from the last point of this digression, as soon as he rises to his vocation for action, in the manner of one uncalled to the task, the beautiful qualities of his character become damaged and injured, and we see at last before us a man who has himself spoiled the best properties of his nature. He who bore the sufferings of humanity with such a feeling soul, becomes in his egotism cruel and severe towards those who stand nearest to his heart. He who is so irritable an enemy to all dissimulation, falsehood, and cunning, not venturing upon the straight path to action, himself takes the crooked way of cunning circumlocution and deceiving dissimulation. He who had weighed his task so conscientiously, veers round from conscientiousness itself, or from tardiness, into unconscientiousness, and converts his mildness into severity. When he finds his uncle kneeling in prayer, he will not kill him lest he should send the penitent to heaven; when, according to his propensity to neglect the near duty and to consider the remote one, and incapable of his own revenge, he wishes, as it were, to take upon himself the vengeance of God, does he not, in order to find excuse for his inaction, abandon himself to a refinement of wickedness and cruelty, such as before he would not have endured even in thought? He was still full of excitement and ardour, as at Polonius' death he was in the confusion of passion, but we see him presently sacrificing innocent men with cold premeditation—he, who was too over-thoughtful to strike the guilty. He is brought to England by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They carry with them a Urias-letter for his death, but they know it not. The open, upright Hamlet opens this letter, writes with feigned hand (an art he had practised in his youth) their names instead of his own, and thus these, the friends of the youth to whom, according to his mother's evidence, he adhered more than to any other, fell into the same pit which was dug for Hamlet, but not by them. They 'go to't?' asks his Horatio in reproachful surprise. But he lightly disregards this emotion of conscience; to dig a mine and pre-

pare a trap suit his nature better than the direct open deed; his ever ingenious head had alone to act here; to plant a countermine is to him as easy as a clever idea; he rejoices inconsiderately and maliciously in these arts, praises himself for the quickness of his thought and the rapidity of its accomplishment, and sophistically sees God's help in the prosperous success—*he* who would not see the many distinct intimations which pointed out to him his duty of revenge! Thus then at last he himself reaches the same point of malice and cunning as his uncle, whose misdeeds he was called upon to revenge.

Still more reproachable does Hamlet appear to us in his relation to his beloved one. Goethe said of Hamlet's feeling for Ophelia, that it was without conspicuous passion. The poet has at any rate not exhibited him to us in a position in which this passion appears pre-eminent. When he casts his love in the scale with that of forty thousand brothers, the exaggeration of the tone affords no standard. Beyond this passage, Shakespeare has only once allowed him a direct opportunity, in a few aside-spoken words, to give us the key to his feeling for Ophelia, in those words which precede his conversation with her: 'Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered!'—words which we have heard uttered by famous actors strangely enough in a tone of comical or facetious address. On the other hand, this very conversation affords the actor scope sufficient to intimate *indirectly* the nature of Hamlet's feelings for Ophelia. If the actor does not here 'tear the passion to tatters,' he will bring the spectator in this scene into a heavy and profound sadness, the very mood in which the conversation leaves Ophelia; it is the farewell of an unhappy heart to a connection broken by fate; it is the serious advice of a self-interested lover, who sends his beloved to a nunnery because he grudges her to another, and sees the path of his own future lie in hopeless darkness. All that in his treatment of Ophelia's father, in his disregard of her brother, in his coldness and indifference towards Polonius, aye, even in her own death, may appear heartless and inconsiderate, is consistent even with a predominant passion for Ophelia in this strange-natured man. His mother regarded this connection as serious in spite of the inequality of station between the two lovers; his oaths to Ophelia we cannot indeed consider in Hamlet as incipient deception. As a son he loved his father with enthusiastic reverence, without being able to do anything for him for the sake of love, and his mother also, without being

able to adhere to his father's exhortation not to torment the weak and deluded woman. Thus he may also have loved Ophelia with a warm heart, without contradicting the apparently most contradictory quality of his nature, that cold egotism with which he torments her first with his madness, then leaves her, and after the unhappy death of her father, devoid of sympathy and sensible to nothing but his own misery, abandons her to despair and insanity. We must seek the counterpart to these traits of character in the history of the affections of equally gifted beings, in whose unfortified souls we shall not unfrequently meet with this blending of the most sensitive feeling and cold hard-heartedness. These very traits will afford us moreover the key-note for Hamlet's intercourse with Ophelia. At his first approach, inexperienced and unsuspicious, she has given him her heart; she has been free in her audience with him, so that neighbours perceiving it have warned the family, and the family have warned herself; his conversation with her is equivocal, and not as Romeo, Bassanio, or even Proteus have spoken with their beloved ones. This has infected her imagination with sensual images and inspired her in her quiet modesty with amorous passions; this is apparent in the songs she sings in her delirium and in the significant flowers she distributes, as clearly as anything so hidden in its nature can and may be unveiled. Further than this we would not venture to go with Goethe's apprehension of this character. Far less can we accept those other views, which returned to the rude legend in 'Saxo Grammaticus,' regarding Ophelia as a fallen innocent. It would not have been in accordance with the fine feeling of Shakespeare to have made the brother utter those sublime words over the corpse of such a fallen one, when the priest would fain refuse her 'sanctified ground'—

> A ministering angel shall my sister be,
> When thou liest howling.

It would not have been like the poet to say expressly over her grave:—

> From her fair and unpolluted flesh
> May violets spring!

It would indeed have been a frivolous insult to innocence in the most solemn place and moment.

The poet has scarcely brought Ophelia before us in her harmless nature, before the tragic events of her life have wounded and

lacerated her heart; so far as he lets us cast a glance upon this part of her history, she appears perfectly unselfish, devoted, and tender, even to dependence and lack of will; in her connection with Hamlet she allows herself to be easily guided by her father and brother; she lends herself to the snare (this Vischer has made conspicuous in his reflections upon Hamlet) placed for her all-sensitive lover, who sees himself abandoned and betrayed by all; when she has seen him in his distraction she gives him back his gifts, which affects the irritable man in this condition like a farewell act. Thus far she is not without guilt in the fate which meets her, however much it belongs to the plan of the play that her fall should strike Hamlet's conscience as that of an innocent sacrifice. Of Polonius, Hamlet himself says expressly that the death of the innocent is his punishment who let the guilty live; a much greater punishment for him is the end of Ophelia, whose father *he*, the lover, had killed, and thus had rent in twain every bond which linked her to the world. To this death her songs incessantly relate; her real madness punishes the feigned insanity of Hamlet, which gave the first shock to her mind. In the same manner Rosencrantz and Guildenstern fall victims to Hamlet's ruined nature. If poetic justice appears too severe in these destinies, it is only that avenging justice may all the more severely recoil upon Hamlet himself. The poet has expressly placed in Hamlet's lips the fearful sentence of cold egotistical levity which exhibits these terrible bloody results of his dread of blood in the right light; a sentence which may be also applied to the end of Paris in Romeo and Juliet. 'Tis dangerous,' he says at the death of his friends, 'when the *baser nature* comes between the pass and fell incensed points of mighty opposites.' In this manner does the man of great genius trifle with the subordinate creature, whom he regards as appointed to play only inferior parts on this stage of life. Thus is it then that the conscientiousness, foresight, and consideration which restrain Hamlet from the murder and from the just punishment of a single man, bury at last the guilty and the guiltless in one common ruin; his own want of determination, the avenging rage of Laertes, the poisoned cup of his uncle, the careless weakness of his mother, the officiousness of his friends, the inoffensive folly of Polonius, the innocence of the devoted lover, each and all these—virtue, and pardonable faults, and inexpiable mortal crimes—suffer the same ruin, so that scarcely any of the living remain upon the stage.

This has been declared to be a kind of barbarous, bloody tragedy, worthy of a rude age, all the characters at last being thus swept from the stage. But in so doing it was the aim of the poet to use this unnecessary bloodshed as part of the characterisation as well as punishment of his hero, who had not courage to shed necessary blood. Shakespeare himself has said this with distinct consciousness. The king asks Laertes whether it is 'writ in his revenge, that, sweepstake, he will draw both friend and foe, winner and loser?' The master of revenge, little conscientious as he is, is satisfied with the punishment of the one guilty one. But the conscientious Hamlet contrives that *he*, as the king designated it, should at one blow actually destroy all by his clumsy revenge. With one single significant word the poet evidently intimates his deep design at the end, and his reference to that question of the king to Laertes. Over the heaps of dead, Fortinbras exclaims, 'this quarry cries on havock!' a word which in sporting language signifies that game, useless from its amount and quality, which is killed by unpractised sportsmen; as here by the unskilful avenger. Thus then this bloody conclusion is not the consequence of an æsthetic fault on the part of the poet, but of a moral fault on that of his Hamlet, a consequence which the sense of the whole play and the design of this character aim at from the first.

MACBETH.

SHAKESPEARE took the subject of Macbeth from Holinshed, who, on his side, borrowed it from Bellenden's Scotch translation of the Latin chronicle of Hector Boethius (1541). In perfect contrast to the rude origin of Hamlet, our dramatist had here before him an excellent and finished subject, the theatrical nature of which Buchanan had already perceived. All lay ready in the material itself and required only psychological development. Macbeth, the cousin of the weak King Duncan, a man by nature inclined to cruelty, forms in combination with Banquo (according to history as well as Shakespeare) the support of the throne against internal rebels and external enemies. The witches prophesy alike to the two chieftains; Macbeth's haughty and proud wife excites him to the regicidal deed, the suspicion of which falls upon the sons who escape. (In the details of the murder, Shakespeare has referred to an earlier page of Scottish history, the murder of King Duff by Donald.) Envy and mistrust of Banquo, who, as Shakespeare also faintly indicates, was his confidant, determine Macbeth to remove him out of his path, but his son Fleance escapes. The growth of Macbeth's suspicion, tyranny, and thirst for blood, his mistrust of Macduff, the flight of that chieftain, the murder of his family, the further deceptive prediction of the witches, and the deliverance of Scotland, all is handed down to the poet in such a simple and natural connection, that without alteration he could take the whole plot, aye, even lengthy passages, such as the conversation between Macduff and Malcolm.

This tragedy has ever been regarded and criticised with distinguishing preference among Shakespeare's works; our own Schiller reproduced it, Schlegel spoke of it with enthusiasm, Drake called it 'the greatest effort of our author's genius, and the most sublime and impressive drama which the world has ever beheld.' It has also obtained favour above the other plays

of Shakespeare in lands peopled by other than the Teutonic race, either from its felt or perceived resemblance to ancient tragedy, or from its unity of design and the simple progress of its development, or from its distinct characterisation, in which the poet has employed less mystery than usual; most of all, indeed, from its pictorial charm and poetic colouring. If perhaps no other play of Shakespeare's can vie with Hamlet in philosophical insight into the nature and worth of the various powers at work in man, if none can compete with Henry IV. in fresh delight in a vast and active career, if none can compare with Othello in profoundness of design and careful carrying out of the characters, if none with Lear in the power of contending passions, and none with Cymbeline in the importance of moral principles, Macbeth, in like manner, stands forth uniquely pre-eminent in the splendour of poetic and picturesque diction and in the living representation of persons, times, and places. Schlegel perceived the vigorous heroic age of the North depicted in it with powerful touches, the generations of an iron time, whose virtue is bravery. How grandly do the mighty forms rise, how naturally do they move in an heroic style! What a different aspect is presented by this tyrant Macbeth by the side of the heroes Macduff, Banquo, and Siward, compared to that of the crook-back Richard amid a crooked generation! Locally, we are transported into the Highlands of Scotland, where everything appears tinged with superstition, full of tangible intercommunion with the supernatural world and prognostics of the moral life by signs in the animate and inanimate kingdom; where, in conformity with this, men are credulous in belief and excitable in fancy; where they speak with strong expression, with highly poetical language, and with unusual imagery, such as strikes us even at the present day in popular orators of the Gaelic races. This mastery over the general representation of time and place is rivalled by the pictures of single circumstances and situations. Reynolds justly admired that description of the martlet's resort to Macbeth's dwelling as a charming image of repose, following by way of contrast the lively picture of the fight. More justly still has praise been always lavished on the powerful representation of the horrible in that night wandering of Lady Macbeth, in the banquet scene, and in the dismal creation of the weird sisters. And far above all this is the speaking truth of the scenes at the murder of Duncan, which

produce a powerful effect even in the most imperfect representation. The fearful whispered conference, in the horrible dimness of which the pair arrange and complete their atrocious project; the heartrending portraiture of Macbeth's state of mind at the deed itself; the uneasy half-waking condition of the sacrificed attendants, one of whom dreams on of the evening feast, the other, in paralysed consciousness, seems to anticipate the impending atrocity; lastly, the external terrors of the night, presenting a foreboding contrast to the tumult of merriment over the yawning graves; all this is so perfectly natural, and wrought to such powerful effect with so little art, that it would be difficult to find its equal in the poetry of any age.

With regard to the date of Macbeth, we only know with certainty that it was acted at the Globe in 1610. Dr. Forman's diary mentions expressly a representation of it on the 20th April of that year. It is conjectured, however, with great probability, that the play was written earlier. The allusion (Act IV. sc. 1) to the union of the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland ('and some I see, that two-fold balls and treble sceptres carry') could have no point, unless made shortly after the event; and James I. was proclaimed King of Great Britain and Ireland on the 20th October, 1604. According to this, Macbeth appeared probably about 1605. We place it, however, directly after Hamlet, because, as Coleridge has already remarked, it affords a complete contrast to this play.

In Hamlet the tragic material is peculiarly enriched in a manner of which ancient tragedy would not have been susceptible. The piece treats of the same theme as 'Orestes.' A husband and father is murdered by the paramour of his wanton wife; the duty of revenge is incumbent on the son. We at once, however, perceive a greater Christian mildness in the touches, inasmuch as no share in or foreknowledge of the murder is attributed to the wife (and this is much more distinctly expressed in the oldest edition of 1603 than in our text), and the spirit of the murdered man especially enjoins the son to attempt nothing against his mother. But apart from this the greater severity of the old myth shows itself in every trait. Orestes schools himself to his revenge from his youth up, his sister urges him on with the same obstinacy of purpose; the task is not alone that of punishing a murderer and usurper with death, but a mother; the avenger has this one aim alone, and knows no scruple; conscience is first

awakened *after* the deed. Here, however, it is aroused in the sensitive Christian heart *before* it, and it weakens both resolve and energy. The poet has, in Hamlet, expressly given prominence to the good Catholic Christianity of the acting personages, and dwelt upon legends, prayers, purgatory, and religious scruples more than is his wont. The ancients depicted as tragic characters those especially who broke out into violent opposition to the divine law and justice, through excess of courage and strength, and through an over-estimate of human will and human freedom; but in Hamlet an excess of weakness is tragically depicted, and he is punished for tardiness of action. In Macbeth, on the other hand, this is reversed. He is the direct opposite to Hamlet, a tragic character in the full sense of the ancients, straining human might and manly audacity to the utmost, whilst he rashly dares fate to enter the lists against him. In that just medium in which Prince Henry is represented, accomplishments, mind, youth, and piety restrain him not from action, and ambition, power, happiness, and opportunity seduce him not to deeds of insolence and injustice; to this medium Hamlet and Macbeth stand in opposite extremes, and perish through their own excess. In both, as it says in Macbeth, 'a good and virtuous nature recoils in an imperial charge,' but in each in a manner wholly different; the tragic reaction is in both equally terrible, but the palsied effort of the one stands in strong contrast to the spasmodic action of the other. The external character of both plays is in perfect accordance with this inner and fundamental difference. The slow advance of the action in Hamlet affords a striking contrast to the rapid march of the catastrophe in Macbeth, the dimness of the former to the strong light and glowing colouring in the latter, the creeping fever of passion in the one to the hasty movement in the other, where the passions, as in Lear, are carried to the utmost bounds of nature, and that of the strongest human kind. The character of the uncertain, fluctuating, wavering Hamlet imparts to the action in the one play the image of standing stagnant water, stirred only in places by whirlpools, while in this play a mighty dangerous rushing stream roars past, in which the boldest swimmer loses power and mastery.

We have already pointed out that we perceived in Hamlet an intention on the part of the poet to depict, as it were, a double-sided period, a turning point in civilisation and develop-

ment in the relation of the hero to his fellow-men; a man of a civilised period standing in the centre of an heroic age of rough manners and physical daring. Here it is reversed, and this appears to us to prove that the contrast was intended; a man possessed with the old energy of the heroic age stands on a similar boundary line, at which the age and society are aiming at milder Christian manners, whilst Macbeth stands like a man belonging to the wilder past, not exactly by nature, but by his deed and its effects; just as, on the other hand, it seemed the task of Hamlet to maintain the usages of the olden time by the exercise of his revenge. The glance cast in the play upon the holy Edward of England and the divine power of healing which lay in his hands, the opposite character in which, compared to the wild heathenish Macbeth, the pious English Siward appears, the true champion of the sainted king, who with resignation sees his son perish in the troop of God's soldiers, the restoration of the rightful rulers of Scotland by the English, who, according to the chronicle, first brought delicacy, luxury, and greater refinement of manners to Scotland—all this indicates the approach of gentler times. Macbeth is unfriendly to them and to their effeminacy. He contemptibly calls these English deliverers, 'epicures.' When Banquo's ghost appears to him, while he is already in the midst of his career of blood, he plainly refers to old times and ways:—

> Blood hath been shed ere now, i' the olden time,
> *Ere human statute purged the gentle weal;*
> Ay, and since too, murders have been perform'd
> Too terrible for the ear: the times have been,
> That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
> And there an end; but now, they rise again,—

such deeds now disturb the conscience which before was not so tender.

The essential difference in the natures of Hamlet and Macbeth is the heroic physical strength which Goethe found lacking in the one, and which the other so fully possesses. When Macbeth appears at the beginning of the play, he is, in all eyes, an admired general; during the fight he had coolly manifested all the qualities of a perfect soldier, 'valour's minion,' 'Bellona's bridegroom.' As a man of action exclusively, he is deficient in the intellectual culture which was Hamlet's pride. Not that he, like Percy, resisted and strove

against it; it never even approached him; nothing of the kind is ever alluded to, not even as a contrast to those around him. At the most, Macbeth's disinclination to all refined cultivation shows itself in the above-mentioned contempt of 'the English epicures.' It belongs to this simple soldier nature that he does not possess a trace of that histrionic art and dissimulation which necessarily resulted from Hamlet's turn of mind. Even where these qualities would have been helpful to him in forwarding his aims or in defending him against danger, he knew not how to adopt them, in spite of his willingness, and in spite of his wife's good example, instructions, and impressive warnings. At the very first prediction of the weird sisters he betrays his emotion to Banquo. He meets his wife with a pre-occupied countenance, which she immediately enjoins him to change for one of concealment. In deep thought he quits the table where the king is his guest. Garrick played this part so as to show that, when once excited, he could not conceal the emotions of his soul, even before Duncan, least of all in the moment of the promotion of the Prince of Cumberland. The quality which further distinctly distinguishes Macbeth from Hamlet, and which is in close connection with his innate thirst for action, is his ambition. This displays itself when he is newly excited by the Northern Fates, in the letter to his wife, the 'dearest partner of his greatness.' Macbeth's whole communication with her leads us to infer long-cherished projects of ambition, for his soaring aims lodge deeper in his wife's bosom than even in his own. For a great object, for a certain gain in this life, Macbeth is ready (and this is the boldest expression of the passion in him) to 'jump the life to come,' which filled Hamlet with fear and doubts. And when once this ambition is set in violent motion by all the combining circumstances of fortune and opportunity, we see Macbeth, the vassal, unlawfully and bloodily taking possession of the throne of his king and benefactor; whilst Hamlet, the true heir, feels neither courage nor inclination to reclaim by a lawful act the throne that is his by right.

However criminal and violent this passion may appear to us thus developed in Macbeth, it is not in him from the outset; the strongest temptations were necessary to bring it into this rapid flow. As long as his ambition yet untempted slumbered within him, we look upon a better nature in Macbeth, which even in his extremest decline never suffers him to sink quite

below himself, nor to lose all his dignity. Before the fatal resolve of the king's murder is fully ripened in his mind, good and evil are weighed in equal balance within him. When his mind is first overtaken with the temptation, he hesitates whether to wait till the way may open to him of itself, or to force the obstruction to yield; before the good nature in the one scale is overburdened by the pressure of his wife's ambition on the other, the equal balance of his nature is strikingly indicated by the characterisation of Macbeth in the lips of this very wife. Macbeth appears to us here exactly at the point where his double nature separates, just as Hamlet does in his first soliloquy, when he stands suspended between his high resolves and the downward pressure of his sluggish temperament. 'Thou wouldst be great,' says Lady Macbeth,—

> Art not without ambition; but without
> The illness should attend it. What thou would'st highly,
> That would'st thou holily; would'st not play false,
> And yet would'st strongly win: thou'd'st have, great Glamis,
> That which cries, '*Thus thou must do, if thou have it:*
> *And that which rather thou dost fear to do,*
> *Than wishest should be undone.*'

She calls him 'too full of the milk of human kindness to catch the nearest way.' This is a description which brings him in his inner undisturbed self in close relation to Hamlet; these words might even be spoken of Hamlet. The poet intends to intimate that he does not find a delicate mental organisation inconsistent with strong physical power. He invests Macbeth at the outset with the tender sentiments of Hamlet; they display themselves in him by the powerful stirrings of his conscience. This voice is in him no less loud, nay, perhaps it is even louder than in Hamlet; only that in the man of business and action it has not the same convenient scope for its extension as in the other. Conscience has not alone in Macbeth, as in the passive Hamlet, to reflect and to doubt, but it has to *do*; it has before the deed to struggle with ambition; then, victorious in its overthrow, at the very deed itself, it rouses repentance in him to a degree of fearful torture, and the man who before never uttered the name of God, who in his conference with the murderers all but declared himself an atheist and mocked at an hereafter, is now in religious anxiety seized with a piteous melancholy, which shocks even his hardened wife, at

the idea that he could not say *Amen* to the prayer of Duncan's attendants. Further on, this mighty voice of his conscience, stifled by a powerful will, yields to his daring, but it is still active and resisting to the last moment. If Macbeth, in this point, is not unlike Hamlet in the original constitution of his mind, he resembles him still more in the excitability of his fancy. But if Hamlet's irresolution sprang out of his conscientiousness, and his cowardice out of his imagination, there is evidence in Macbeth, on the other hand, that an innate manly power and effort can master the strongest stirrings of conscience, as well as the mightiest workings of the fancy. For as we have said that the voice of conscience was *perhaps* louder in Macbeth than in Hamlet, so the paralysing effect of imagination was without doubt stronger in him than in the other. Anxious presentiments find in him a nature easily alarmed. He says himself that, in ordinary circumstances, his fancy gave rise to fear and excitement. The time had been when a night-shriek would have cooled his senses, and a dismal treatise would rouse his 'fell of hair.' His wife was aware of this his peculiarity, and knew how apt it was to weaken his activity and his resolve; she warns him, therefore, continually not to be alone, nor to indulge in dark thoughts; 'you do unbend your noble strength,' she says to him, 'to think so brainsickly of things.' Nevertheless, in this very quality, which in the energetic man is energetic and therefore indeed of a different nature and effect to that in Hamlet, Macbeth possessed an actual incentive to action. 'Present fears are less' to this man of action than 'horrible imaginings;' on the battle-field he maintained a natural cheerfulness; under the power of evil forebodings he becomes weak. The mere conception of the murder makes his 'seated heart knock at his ribs,' and 'shakes his single state of man' so violently, that 'function is smothered in surmises' of the future, and nothing is present to him, 'but what is not.' Thus, quite unlike Hamlet, who inactively revels and delights in the appearance of the ghost, and in the torture of his forebodings and fancies, Macbeth gives us the impression of rushing into action to escape the agony of mental struggle and terror. On his way to commit the crime, his heated imagination brings a dagger before him, on which he sees 'gouts of blood' arise; his eyes are here 'the fools o' the other senses,' as his ear is afterwards, when he fancies he hears the voice cry, 'Glamis hath murdered sleep!' But this imagination

restrains him not from murdering the servants, nor did that first apparition withhold him from the murder of the king. The contrast exists here also, for Macbeth's fancy does not rest in doubts and soliloquies, but impels to action, picturing to him the very weapon for his deed; whereas in Hamlet's case, the admonisher both seen and heard, the ghost of his father, vanishes again from his remembrance like a delusion. That they see ghosts is, with both Hamlet and Macbeth, the strongest proof of the power of the imaginative faculty. We need hardly tell our readers, whom we imagine to be more and more initiated into the mind of our poet, that his spirit-world signifies nothing but the visible embodiment of the images conjured up by a lively fancy, and that their apparition only takes place with those who have this excitable imagination.[1] The cool Gertrude sees not Hamlet's ghost, the cold, sensible Lady Macbeth sees not that of Banquo, the dry, ironical Lenox and his companions see neither this nor the witches; these appear indeed to Banquo, who is neither free from ambitious ideas nor is mastered by them, but the witches address him not till he speaks to them.

In the witches, Shakespeare has made use of the popular belief in evil geniuses and in adverse persecutors of mankind, and has produced a similar but darker race of beings, just as he made use of the belief in fairies in the Midsummer Night's Dream. This creation is less attractive and complete, but not less masterly. The poet, in the text of the play itself, calls these beings *witches* only derogatorily; they call themselves weird sisters; the Fates bore this denomination, and these sisters remind us indeed of the Northern Fates or Valkyries. They appear wild and weather-beaten in exterior and attire, common in speech, ignoble half-human creatures, ugly as the evil one, and in like manner old and of neither sex. They are guided by more powerful masters, their work entirely springs from delight in evil, and they are wholly devoid of human sympathies. Schiller's reproduction of them is entirely opposed to the poet's intention, and nothing that Schlegel has said against this travesty is too harsh. The reverse of the ancient Eumenides, these weird sisters are not avengers after the deed, but

[1] Shakespeare, therefore, did not mind the apparent inconsistency, in Hamlet, of making the man to whom the ghost has appeared say that from the bourn of that undiscovered country no traveller returns.

tempters to it, the panders to sin. A definite and mechanical power over man is, however, in nowise bestowed on them; and Lamb was utterly wrong in his opinion that they *generated* deeds of blood and *originated* evil impulses in the soul. Thus Schlegel also said that Macbeth yielded to a deep-laid hellish temptation and to supernatural impulses; but this gives throughout an opposite idea of Shakespeare's meaning, if we are to understand more by it than that the soaring and ambitious desires of Macbeth himself are of a supernatural and more than ordinary strength. The poet has endowed these creatures with the power to tempt and delude men, to entangle them with oracles of double meaning, with delusion and deception, and even to try them, as Satan in the Book of Job, with sorrow and trouble, with storms and sickness; but they have no authority with fatalistic power to do violence to the human will. Their promises and their prophecies leave ample scope for freedom of action; their occupations are 'deeds without a name.' They are simply the embodiment of inward temptation; they come in storm and vanish in air, like corporeal impulses, which, originating in the blood, cast up bubbles of sin and ambition in the soul; they are weird sisters only in the sense in which men carry their own fates within their own bosoms. Macbeth, in meeting them, has to struggle against no external power, but only with his own nature; they bring to light the evil side of his character, which was not to be read in his face; he does not stumble upon the plans of his royal ambition, because the allurement approaches him from without; but this temptation is sensibly awakened in him, because those plans have long been slumbering in his soul. Within himself dwell the spirits of evil which allure him with the delusions of his aspiring mind. They approach him as he stands on the highest step of his fortune, his favour, and his valour. The rebellion he has just crushed places him above the weak Duncan, who is powerless to help himself; the newly obtained rank of Thane of Cawdor increases his influence, and suggests to him the consideration of how far more successfully he could have played the part of traitor than the deposed chief who bore the title before him; to this is then added the opportunity of Duncan's visit, and the influence of his wife. These are natural promptings of such weight, that altogether they form, indeed, the supernatural power which Shakespeare has poetically embodied according to the tradition. Thus Macbeth's genius feels itself

'rebuked' by Banquo, as Antony's was by Cæsar; envy and jealousy against Banquo, the joint subduer of the rebellion, lie thus naturally within him, and are afterwards only aroused by the prophecy in favour of Banquo's descendants. His self-reliance told him (the witches needed not to tell him) that he had no cause to fear any of woman born, unless it be this Macduff from whom he shrinks even before those demons have warned him of him. They only rouse to watchfulness the slumbering thoughts of his soul, as they say of the armed head: they know his thoughts. As Macduff's death is uppermost in his mind, so on their first appearance was that of Duncan; when they lay open to him the way to the throne, they did but 'harp' then upon his own ambition, as now upon his foreboding fears of Macduff. Thus these prophetesses make Macbeth by their first appearance no other than, according to his wife's delineation, he is already. As in Hamlet the ghost of his father, or, what is the same, that inward presentiment which grows ever more and more in the son into tangible certainty, rouses up a sluggish will, so in Macbeth the witches, or the false images of his ambition, tempt an already predisposed will and a character hitherto unsullied. He stands *after* their temptation at the same cross-way of action at which his wife saw him before it overtook him. He hesitates whether to call this apparition good or ill, which Banquo at once is inclined to regard as an 'instrument of darkness;' the idea of murder 'unfixes' indeed his hair; yet he reflects that if chance will have him king, chance may crown him 'without his stir,' as it had made him Thane of Cawdor. He proposes at the first to Banquo that they should speak their free hearts to each other upon this apparition, as a means of remaining guiltless.

But to this good purpose Banquo alone remained faithful, and not Macbeth. The former is opposed to the latter as a complemental character, and this contrast is displayed at once in the relation of both to the witches' temptation. Banquo has the same heroic courage, the same merit, and the same claims as Macbeth; it is natural, therefore, that the same ambitious thoughts should arise in the one as in the other. But in Banquo they arise in a calmer nature, susceptible of the finest discretion, and therefore they do not master him as they do Macbeth. Where the latter receives favour, distinction, visit, title, and power, as a reward from his sovereign, Banquo has only to thank him for an embrace, for a pressure to his heart. And

for this the modest man replies, 'There if I grow, the harvest is your own.' The fruit even of this small favour he gives to the king. And then quietly, in the absence of his favoured rival, he extols to the king the qualities of Macbeth, while the latter envies him from the very first on account of the prophecy which favoured his (Banquo's) descendants in the same way as it did himself personally. Equally noble as Banquo's conduct is in this instance, is his calm self-possession during this very prophecy. He doubts at first whether his eyes do not deceive him, or whether the witches may not be something of those empty bubbles which, according to tradition, the earth casts up as well as the water, while Macbeth is at once entranced and credulously listens to their words. The latter could not have called out to them, as Banquo did, that he neither did 'beg nor fear their favours nor their hate.' Macbeth has already scarcely an ear for Banquo's warning that they may be the 'instruments of darkness,' who told them truths to win them to their harm, who sought to win them 'with honest trifles, to betray them in deepest consequence.' If Banquo is of calmer blood than Macbeth, he is, however, not bloodless. Like Macbeth he has temptations to struggle against, but he withstands them with more powerful self-government. He has tempting dreams which trouble him; he drives them away by prayer, that they may not come again; he does more than pray, he struggles against sleep itself that he may escape them. Waking, his spirit masters the 'cursed thoughts,' whilst in sleep nature pays tribute to the blood by giving way to these dreams. In his unrest he meets Macbeth. The guiltless man confesses his dreams, the guilty denies further thought on the weird sisters; he who at first had himself wished for free interchange of thought now avoids it. That Banquo should know what he knows is oppressive to Macbeth; the unconscientious man feels burdened by the proximity of the conscientious one, the evil by the good, the envious by the successful. Banquo might have been his good angel; but, avoiding intercourse with him, he falls under the influence of his evil genius, his wife. Banquo had shared with him the temptation of warlike greatness and distinction; that of a rise in power had passed him by; the temptation of good opportunity was also spared him, and, last of all, the mightiest stimulant of all, the influence of an ambitious wife.

The opportunity which next presented itself to Macbeth

was of such a nature that it held him wavering in the balance, though heavy weights were in either scale. The king passes a night in his dwelling. The royal guest enters trustfully and with careless pleasure beneath that roof where the wandering martlet had found an undisturbed abode. He is a virtuous monarch, beloved and valued by his people, he is Macbeth's nearest kinsman and cousin, his prince, his panegyrist, his benefactor; he had just bestowed on him the dignity of the Thane of Cawdor, the rank of the fallen rebel who with hypocrisy had turned traitor to the good sovereign; his favour, so Duncan promises Macbeth, will still continue towards him; he acknowledges himself so indebted to him, that 'more is due than more than all can pay.' Even on that evening of 'unusual pleasure,' with royal liberality he makes rich presents to the wife and servants of his host! But unfortunately, in presence of Macbeth, he had declared his son to be his heir upon the throne; this excites in Macbeth more strongly the thought of shortening the course of fate, of putting spurs 'to prick the sides of his intent' to leap over the impediment, without considering that such a leap was close upon a fall. He is so far advanced already, that he pronounces himself ready for the dreadful deed, if he could but be sure of the result. But in these things he knows that an 'even-handed justice' rules, which even here 'commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice to our own lips.' Considerations of all kinds arise against his crime, while every motive spurred Hamlet on to his deed. Nevertheless, his ambition still struggles in a scarcely equal strife with his conscience, and with that Hamlet-like habit of 'thinking too precisely on the event.' In this struggle his wife's urgency determines him to take the evil course. And this she effects essentially by the incitement of his valour and by the ambitious incentive of his claim to glory and to the name of manliness, an ambition which all those supernatural examples and warnings could not stir up in Hamlet.

Shakespeare has taken the idea of Macbeth's wife from an allusion in Holinshed's chronicles to the wife of Donald, who instigates her husband to the murder of King Duff. She appears, at first sight, as a Clytemnestra in pride, cruelty, firmness, and unscrupulousness, a powerful woman, awakening in us more fear than hate, possessing a frightfully determined will and thrice-steeled resolve. The complete antitype to her husband's irritable and imaginative nature, she is calm in

judgment and cold in blood. No supernatural temptation approaches her, but only the substantial one in her husband's letter; no warning voice of conscience, no forebodings of terrible consequences alarm her, as they do Macbeth, *before* the deed; *while* it is being perpetrated she remains circumspect, deliberate, ready for dissimulation; *after* it she would have been able speedily to forget what had happened. She feels that to dwell on such deeds, as Macbeth does, would make her mad; she therefore dissuades from it, and is composed enough on her side to follow out this counsel. A will of uncommon instinctive firmness renders her in a remarkable manner mistress of herself. She knows that by dissimulation, foresight, and cunning she could commit and conceal the fatal deed in question; she scorns the bare idea that she could fail; she goes through her part so perfectly that no suspicion falls on her. Only in the first moment, when Duncan's arrival is mentioned to her, when she sees a propitious fate in the opportunity thus afforded, she betrays, in the joy of her heart, somewhat of what is going on within her by exclaiming, 'Thou'rt mad to say it!' But this she never does again. Conscious of qualities which fit her for such a work, she urges her irresolute husband to the fearful deed; she forces him to 'screw his courage to the sticking place.' Her husband contents her only when he conceived the idea of creating for himself the opportunity which now offers itself unexpectedly. She urges him to snatch as a prey what may be the gift of destiny, and the natural eloquence and persuasiveness of courage, resolve, and unity of purpose overcome the silent, wavering, and thoughtful man. In this eloquence Lady Macbeth may appear to us as an incarnate devil, divested of every trace of womanhood and humanity. Had she so sworn as he, she says to Macbeth, she would have dashed the brains out of her smiling babe, although she knew from experience how tender was the love of the nursing mother. Nevertheless, even at this most unnatural pitch of her passion and cruelty, we perceive that the poet has not wholly deprived this woman of the milk of human kindness. In this strain upon her feelings, in this abnegation of her womanhood, she does violence indeed to her nature. She calls upon hellish spirits to aid her in unsexing herself, a trait otherwise foreign to her whole being. These are to fill her 'top-full' of direst cruelty, and to 'stop up the access and passage to remorse, that no compunctious visitings of nature' should shake her purpose.

Knowing her consort well, she arrogates to herself the manly part, for which she endeavours to screw up her nature, that she may herself carry out and perpetrate the murder. Macbeth, she says, was only to 'look up clear and leave all the rest to *her*.' *She* makes the plans and talks of herself and him, both of whom are to have a share in the work; *she* drugs the servants and lays their daggers ready; she finds the potion which she had used to make the attendants drunk necessary to inspire herself with courage and firmness. She would even give the blow with her own hands, but at the moment itself her overwrought nature gives way. Those compunctious visitings of nature which she had banished from herself shake her when she traces in the sleeping king a resemblance to her father, and the woman must leave that business to the man, which needs more than man to execute it. So, too, subsequently she is shaken by the touching utterance of his remorse, although she had invoked the spirits to 'stop up the access' to such feelings. But when the danger of discovery alarms her, she quickly recovers her composure, foresight, and fearlessness, and can look down reproachfully upon the man of 'infirm purpose.' She has from the beginning rather the security of a spectator in the game. She loses that security the moment she attempts to act in it; she recovers it as soon as she returns to her first position. Still she has had her part in the game, as it were, even before it was designed. The dreams of ambition had indeed early been dreamed by both; the vague dreams, under the influence of temptation and opportunity, had ripened in her soul more rapidly into actual purpose than in his. The courage necessary for these projects, and the firm resolve to carry them out, rest in her boundless confidence in this strong man, to whom she trusts everything, to whom she thinks all greatness due, and on whose high qualities she delights and leans. This is the peculiarity of her nature and her history, and it is just this which must so far reconcile us to her character and which prevents her from wholly forfeiting our pity. Almost every commentator has discerned in this character a better side, but few have succeeded in seeking it in the right place and seeing it in its proper light. Hitherto her husband had been only a child of fortune and honour; she knows she may rely on him, and that he is sufficient for all things and successful in them. She is far more filled with the idea of what he might and should be than he is himself. She knows

him to be the worthiest to rule and she wishes to confer the crown upon his merit. His manly nature is her pride and her glory. When *he* sees only dangerous results, she, in her idea of him, is sure of the happiest success; she 'feels the future in the instant,' but in fearless expectation and unbroken splendour. In this she is far more a dependent wife than an independent masculine woman, for she wishes the golden circlet rather for him than for herself. Her whole ambition is for him and through him; of herself and of elevation for herself she never speaks. She lives only in him and in his greatness. How triumphantly she receives him with that 'Hail' (which flatters her pride so much), 'thou that shalt be king hereafter!' We see in this marriage a union of esteem, aye, of deep reverence, rather than one of sensitive affection. The poet has not left this unexplained. She has had children, but has reared none. This may have added another sting to Macbeth's jealousy of Banquo; but the most natural consequence is that the pair are drawn more personally together and are more given up to self-gratification. Our Romanticists have made Lady Macbeth a heroine of virtue, and Goethe rightly condemned the foolish way in which they stamped her as a loving spouse and house-wife. Nevertheless, from all we have said, the connection between the two may be pronounced affectionate, and from their mode of intercourse even tender. The caressing words which Macbeth uses ('dearest chuck,' &c.) are not those usually bestowed upon a Juno or a Clytemnestra; the woman who, in order to impel Macbeth to action and to secure safety in danger, utters so many stinging and contemptuous expressions towards him, uses not one word of blame or reproach to him when they are left alone at the close of the banquet scene. If, however, these traits do not render it evident that her womanliness was only suppressed and not extinguished, the issue of events proves this incontestably. When the deed is accomplished, she stands at first still, while Macbeth now begins to push on with bolder strides. But when none of the golden expectations are realised which she expected as the result of the deed, when instead of successful greatness the ruin of the land and of her consort follows, her powers suddenly relax and sink. Supported by him, she could have long and for ever withstood the emotions of conscience, nature, and a harrowing imagination; but doubting him, she doubts herself also. Like ivy, she had twined her fresh greenness around the branches of the kingly tree; when

the stem totters she falls to the ground; her iron heart dissolves in the fire of this affliction and this mistaken expectation. It has been regretted that the transition from her masculine strength to her feminine weakness has not been more fully depicted by the poet. This, however, was no gradual change, but a sudden overthrow. As in him she had forced the man beyond his nature, so in herself she had raised the woman to an heroic strength. He began, like a true man, within the limits of reasonable human ambition, and then overstepped them in that 'security,' that self-dependent daring, which ruined him; she, on the contrary, began too high, beyond, indeed, the sphere of her sex, and all at once she sinks again to a mere woman. In the man, the boldness of crime, mixed with the obdurate pride of the mightiest of his race, was strong enough to increase after the first misdeed, and he endeavoured to win by obstinate perseverance the success withheld from him; in her this boldness dwindles to nothing as soon as the issue disappoints her. Now, while *his* leaves slowly wither before the storm, she, who once advanced so boldly, shrinks silently back, a bare and leafless branch. That counsel which she urged upon Macbeth, not to be alone, sprung from the deepest self-knowledge; when she is divided from his pursuits and separated from his companionship, then it is, as Malcolm said, that—

> the grief that does not speak
> Whispers the o'erfraught heart, and bids it break.

Still even now her character and the strength of her will are evident, her resistance in suffering is now as apparent as before her activity in doing. By day she continues mistress of her emotions, but in the night 'her fear-infected mind to the deaf pillow will discharge its secrets.' According to the poet's poetic physiology and psychology, her unnaturally strained conscience and power of dissimulation avenge themselves during sleep, and the somnambulist, self-betraying, acts as it were all the secret guilty scenes over again. Once she thought she could with a little water clear away the witnesses of that deed, but now, in the torture of her hardened heart, she complains, with groans of anguish, that the smell and stain of blood will never wash away. She ends her life with suicide.

This woman, then, who by her devotion and identification with Macbeth is far more dangerous to her husband than she

could have been had her nature been independent and masculine, employs those means to determine his fatal resolution which she thinks the most effectual; she rouses, as we before said, his energy, she calls upon his ambition and touches him upon his manliness. When she reproaches him with want of love, it moves him not; when she confidently promises him a certain success, it rather makes him hesitate; but when she touches him upon his manliness, he is conquered at once. 'Art thou afeard,' she says to him,

> To be the same in thine own act and valour,
> As thou art in desire? Would'st thou have that
> Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
> And live a coward in thy own esteem;
> Letting '*I dare not*' wait upon '*I would*,'
> Like the poor cat i' the adage?

which wished to catch the fish, but not to wet its feet. Even here he answers her from the honourable position which he had hitherto always maintained, urging that noble principle of action which well accords in sense with that saying of Hamlet, to which he should have stood firm:—

> I dare do all that may become a man;
> *Who dares do more, is none!*

Sarcastically drawing him from this position, she asks, 'What beast was it then that made you break this enterprise to me?' And while she forces him from this position, she adds:—

> When you durst do it, then you were a man;
> And to be *more* than what you were, *you would*
> *Be so much more the man.*

This was the spur which, as he says of his ambition, 'pricked the sides of his intent,' and made him leap the bounds of manhood and humanity. Again and again his wife harps upon this string, and, instead of a single tone, he answers with a full chord. Indeed, after his first remorse is overcome, during and following the murder of the king, her appeals are needed only once more at the apparition of Banquo's ghost; for immediately after the murder he out-does her designs. Even in his horror after the deed she calls him 'infirm of purpose,' and says ''tis the eye of childhood that fears a painted devil,' that trembles before the sleeping or the dead; her hands are as bloody as his,

but she would 'shame to wear a heart so white.' Immediately afterwards he acts without her help; he kills the servants, to whom the murder was to be imputed, a matter she had not thought of; she thinks when she has laid the daggers beside them that all is done, but *he*, when he sees the men and her terror, grows more clear-sighted to the danger, and is ready to commit a new murder for their safety, while *she* is on the point of fainting. He goes yet further; the curse of the evil deed, that it must for ever bring forth new evil, is being fulfilled; 'things bad begun' he will 'make strong by ill.' He feared the evil consequences, but now he creates them himself. He is seized with mistrust against the man who shares with him the knowledge of those predictions; Banquo too is suspicious of him, but he keeps his suspicion in his own bosom; but what enrages Macbeth most of all against him is his jealousy of the succession promised to Banquo's descendants. The result of the crime seems yet uncertain, if this prophecy stands good; ambition was not satisfied so long as this drawback remained. Macbeth here rouses himself to that supernatural might which boldly opposes itself to fate. If he believed the sayings of the weird sisters, as he had cause to do, he must believe also that one which favoured Banquo. He thinks, however, he can force from fate his own good fortune and can ruin Banquo's. In solemn words (Act III. sc. 1) he calls 'fate into the list to champion him to the utterance.' He instigates the murderers of Banquo and his son. It is very remarkable that for this business he employs the very means which had wrought most effectually upon himself: he appeals to the manliness of the murderers. He now spares his wife the crime of being accessory to Banquo's death; she too had thought on it, but he has accomplished it already, and that without her. The escape of Fleance is to remind him yet again of the infallibility of the prediction. But he now consoles himself with the thought that this foe had 'no teeth for the present.' Thus fear of Banquo and an evil conscience towards one who knew his secret combined to cause his death. This fear and this conscience are once more to shake his resolute manliness when the ghost of Banquo appears to him. This unhinges his nature, his wife silences the company, palliates and excuses his paroxysms with her old presence of mind, and reminds him of his weakness with the old stinging reproof: 'Are you a man?' 'Aye,' he answers, 'and a bold one, that dare look on that which might

appal the devil.' She continues her bitter sarcasms at his want of manliness: 'these flaws, and starts, would well become a woman's story at a winter's fire.' Upon this he grows so bold as even to drink the health of the just vanished Banquo, and again the apparition shakes his iron nerves. He may assert, 'What man dare, I dare!' and yet his manliness disappears at this awful sight. These are the last struggles of his conscience and of his fearful imaginings. But a short time ago he had looked back amid the stings of remorse almost enviously upon Duncan's peaceful sleep 'after life's fitful fever;' he now sees himself 'stepp'd in so far in blood,' that 'returning were as tedious as go o'er.' Hitherto he had shrunk from Banquo's suspicion and pursuit; now he keeps spies in every house, threatens the escaped princes, summons the absent Macduff, and orders the slaughter of his family. Hitherto the qualms of conscience in the man who had murdered sleep had manifested themselves in that he had murdered his own sleep, and had lost this refreshment of nature, and had suffered from terrible dreams; now through all his cruel schemes, he sleeps calmly, 'in spite of thunder.' The time had been when his lively fancy would have been excited by a 'night-shriek;' now, 'supp'd full of horrors,' he had almost 'forgot the taste of fears.' Formerly he pondered over his actions, and consideration and reflection preceded and accompanied his deeds; now he has 'things in head, which must be acted, ere they can be scann'd;' he considers himself still young and unripe in deeds until he has achieved that the deed shall go with the purpose, that the 'firstlings of his heart shall be the firstlings of his hand,' that all boasting 'like a fool' shall be given up, and 'be it thought and done' shall be his only motto. This extreme thirst for action had been brought upon him by the flight of Macduff. He foreboded evil from him, he delayed his death, he hears from the weird sisters that actual danger lies in him; from thenceforth he determines to lose no further deed by delay. In this over-straining of his nature he is confirmed by the weird sisters, who now work upon him under the direction of their queen. It is their aim to nourish in him this hardening in sin, this dependence upon human power, this contempt of divine law, which in those days was called *security*, a word which, in that sense, our language has subsequently lost. This denial of religious dependence, this absence of conscientious scruples, and this boastful confi-

dence upon human strength are expressly called by the weird sisters, 'mortal's chiefest enemy.' Their equivocal prophecy confirms him in this security, their object being to make him hasten his fate, defy death, and carry his hopes beyond all moderation, mercy, and fear. When, therefore, he experiences the last temptations of the devil and sees his tragic end at hand, we perceive now, just as before under his wife's insinuations, this pride of manhood rising in him to the last. When this false 'security' is first shaken by doubts, his former fear rises again, struggling with his manliness; but he conquers it again,—a coward in conscience, he is still valiant in will. As Birnam wood approaches, for a moment his determination fails, then, however, he rouses himself to defence with that madness which his admirers calls courageous fury. When Macduff says to him that he was 'from his mother's womb untimely ripped,' he yields to fear, and exclaims, 'I'll not fight with thee.' But a taunt in Macduff's words, as formerly in his wife's, stimulates him, and at once the hero revives, as a hero to die. Grand like that Hagen in the Nibelungen Lied, he compels admiration even while increasing in cruelty; the impress of innate heroism is visible in him to the last, so that the greatness of his manly strength and the might of his resolution almost outweigh and equal the magnitude of his guilt.

To exhibit Macbeth, with his noble disposition and fine nature, led to this point of security by the temptations of ambition and pride, is the aim of this play. At this point Macbeth appears in perfect contrast to Hamlet. The 'honest ghost' of his father had required of the latter a righteous deed; a ghost returned from purgatory had from human feelings called upon his human nature; Macbeth, on the contrary, is tempted in doubtful riddles by the deceitful powers of evil, by beings destitute of every human feeling, to an unjust and wholly unnatural deed. Nature and reason spur Hamlet on; they restrain Macbeth. Hamlet, urged to action, lingers in the hope that the result may arise of itself; Macbeth, on the contrary, who is advised to wait, snatches at the result beforehand. Opportunity favours both, but one suffers it to escape, the other seizes it; and both alike are dead to conscience. The one is stung by 'all occasions,' and loads himself with reproaches of cowardice, calling himself a coward, a villain, and an ass; nevertheless, he remains below himself and his powers, while Macbeth is roused beyond himself by the

demands of his wife upon his manliness. The one, once fallen into inaction, sinks deeper and deeper; the other, hurried on by his thirst for action, rises to greater defiance. Averse to the path of blood, Hamlet remains lax and weak-hearted, while Macbeth strides boldly on in open defiance of the higher powers; the one morbid in his avoidance of action, the other, as we have said, in his eagerness for it. At last, having reached that extreme point, Hamlet's indecision, his anguish of conscience, and his moral insecurity stand entirely opposed to that godless and flagitious '*security*,' in which Macbeth, having entirely lost his early true-heartedness, appears almost devilish. From this point there is no further comparison between the two. At this stage in his career Macbeth has been often, and in detail, compared with Richard III. By this comparison of Macbeth, as he is at his end with quite another extreme of character, we arrive at the same result as by the comparison of Macbeth, as he is at the outset, with Hamlet. Both Macbeth and Richard are drawn into the path of crime by high-soaring ambition, as both similarly express it: 'so far in blood, that sin will pluck on sin.' But Richard, formed by nature for evil, commits it with cool calculation, instigated by himself, and conspiring against all around him; Macbeth, by nature mild and noble, is driven to it by the instigations of a beloved wife, and by temptations and golden opportunities conspiring against him. Both are traitors, usurpers, tyrants, but Richard is so through dissimulation, hypocrisy, and policy, while Macbeth is nothing but a soldier; the fall of the one is caused by a deeper hypocrite, that of the other by a nobler hero. Both are surrounded with accessories in guilt, but Richard in his contempt of men does not care for Buckingham, the petty rival of a meaner race; Macbeth, on the contrary, has none of this contempt of men in him; he recognises with involuntary respect the loftier genius and the equal power in Banquo and Macduff. Both alike stifle conscience with the force of the will, but Richard is capable of being pleased and even merry in the midst of his bloody events, while Macbeth, with all his success, is not one moment happy. 'All that is within him,' it was said of him, 'does condemn itself, for being there.' With inward anguish he looks back at last upon all his fallen hopes, upon the lack of all that should accompany old age, upon the want of friends and honour; this lack would have been wholly indifferent to Richard. Both are equally

victims to the emotions of fear and conscience in the moment of final decision; they strike the messengers of evil, they contradict themselves in their distraction and confuse themselves in their haste, but Richard's is the behaviour of a criminal seeking to escape his judge, Macbeth's that of a warrior boldly fighting for honour against charmed weapons. Both are alike in that flagitious security and in the valiant rage with which they man themselves for a desperate cause; Steevens finely remarked that it is a favourite moral of Shakespeare, that crime and a bad conscience make cowards of the bravest: both, however, are an exception to this rule, and their warlike audacity and fearlessness increase with their guilt; yet Macbeth appears the more fearlessly calm of the two in meeting his last struggle, certain as he is of its evil issue.

As regards poetic justice in the fates of Duncan, Banquo, and Macduff, there lies in the nature of all these a contrast to that of Macbeth, a light upon which is thrown by the position which Shakespeare has assigned to Hastings with regard to Richard III. While in Macbeth extraordinary might, scorn of man and God, security, in the religious sense of the word, from avenging and unearthly powers, and security, in the ordinary sense, from all dangerous rivals, obtained by the use of all lawful and unlawful means, are displayed, and end in ruin; while in the other characters, weakness, irresolution, feebleness, the want of forethought which neglects even lawful means of defence against danger, and the security of credulousness and passiveness, are equally fatal; the right course lies in the medium, in Macduff, after experience has at length schooled him, and in the prudent Malcolm, who early learned its lessons. King Duncan is characterised in history as a man of greater weakness than became a king; treason was common under his rule; he was no warrior to suppress it, no physiognomist to read it in the countenance; he had but just gained a painful experience from the treachery of the friendly Thane of Cawdor, and at once, passing by the modest Banquo, he elevates Macbeth to this very dignity, thus pampering his ambition; and he suffers a cruel penalty for his own fault from the new thane, his own relation. The same want of foresight ruins Banquo. He had been initiated into the secret of the weird sisters; pledged to openness towards Macbeth, he had opportunity of convincing himself of his obduracy and secrecy; he guesses at, and strongly suspects, Macbeth's deed; yet he

does nothing against him or in self-defence; in another manner to those cowardly impersonations of fear, the doctor, Seyton, Rosse, and the spying, ironical Lenox, he suppresses his thoughts and wilfully shuts his eyes; he falls, having done nothing in a region full of dangers. Macduff is not quite so culpable in this respect; he is not, therefore, punished in his own person, but in the fate of his family, thus becoming the martyr-hero by whom Macbeth was to fall. Macduff is described in the play as noble, wise, clear-sighted, and choosing well his opportunity. This he proves himself. He is at first honestly inclined to believe that Duncan's attendants had accomplished the murder of the king; that Macbeth slays them startles him, but he carefully conceals his unproved suspicion. He does not, however, go to the coronation, he avoids seeing Macbeth, and at length, taught by prudence, he flees. Thus far circumspect in all things, he neglects to take his family with him, and his wife, warned in vain by his and Rosse's example, and by the caution of a third, falls a victim to this same want of foresight. The stroke which now befalls his house, and therefore himself, stirs up within this man the power which undertakes to measure itself against Macbeth. In his undisturbed nature, Macduff is what Macbeth once was: a mixture of mildness and power; and more than Macbeth, because he is without any element of ambition. When Donaldbain has fled from the shock, and Malcolm accuses himself before Macduff of every imaginable misdeed, not a shadow of ambition to raise himself into the usurper's place steals over him; he bids farewell to Scotland and to hope. Thus noble, blameless, and clement, we should think Macduff entirely wanting in that goad of sharp ambition necessary to make him a victorious opponent of Macbeth, and to enable him to stand his ground against that mighty and infuriated man; the poet, therefore, by the horrible extermination of his family, divests him of the milk of human kindness, and makes him by this means at once fitted to be the conqueror of Macbeth. This is wonderfully shown by a couple of strokes in that scene between Macduff and Malcolm. When he hears the dreadful news, he silently draws his hat over his brows and conceals his sorrow. 'My children too? My wife killed too?' are his only words, and then the self-reproach: 'And I must be from thence!' Malcolm bids him seek comfort in revenge. He heeds him not. 'He has no children!' these words of Macduff were

inconsiderately referred by Tieck to Malcolm.[1] And Malone, Horn, and Simrock, who indeed apply them to Macbeth, endeavoured to find in them the expression of rage, because he, Macduff, could not therefore sufficiently revenge himself. The whole nobility of this character and its thorough contrast to Macbeth would be lost by this reading. This is one of the best examples to show how the clever actor will always be a better interpreter of Shakespeare than the most learned commentator. The most famous actors of Macduff in Garrick's time, Wilks and Ryan, saw in these words only the deepest expression of paternal agony, out of which Macduff arises only by degrees to composure and the desire for revenge. Nothing can be plainer than this. 'Dispute it like a man,' says Malcolm to him; he answers:—

> I shall do so;
> But I must also feel it as a man:
> I cannot but remember such things *were*,
> That were most precious to me.

Then once again he returns to his self-reproach, that they were all struck for his sake, the sinful one. Malcolm reminds him once more to make this 'the whetstone of his sword.' And even now Macduff feels himself divided between his fatherly feelings and his desire for vengeance; he could 'play the woman with his eyes, and braggart with his tongue.' At length he yields to the thirst for revenge, which longs for action with the impatience of Macbeth, and is not to be appeased with words and delays.

Malcolm is represented in contrast to the thoughtless security of all the others. The dialogue between him and Macduff, which is actually at full length in the chronicle, appeared in a remarkable manner to suit the poet and his plot.

[1] It is most strange that Tieck neglected to bring forward the only thing which he could say on behalf of his interpretation. Macbeth, according to the words of his wife, has had children. It does not follow from this that he has children, but rather that he *has had* them. Macbeth, therefore, *had* experienced how painful is the loss of children, a feeling of which the words of Macduff would seem to deprive him. Did Shakespeare overlook this, as Goethe thought, unconcernedly, because in this place he wanted one characteristic trait and in the other another? We may just as well, however, say that Macduff overlooked it in the greatness of his anguish, and that he would not grant the father, who had no living children and no present cares for them, the tender paternal heart which he himself possessed.

Full of suspicion, Malcolm had fled at the beginning; Macbeth had ensnared and allured him, and this has made him just as watchful and cautious as his father was trustfully unsuspecting. Since then 'modest wisdom had plucked him from over-credulous haste.' He arms himself with suspicion against Macduff. He mistrusts the apparent want of feeling with which Macduff had left his wife behind. He openly confesses his suspicion to him. 'Let not,' he says, 'my jealousies be your dishonours, but mine own safeties.' He even goes so far, in order to try Macduff, as to vilify himself and his character. We may object to this as unnatural. Yet in the embittered and suspicious state of mind of the orphaned, oft-tempted, and betrayed young man, it is not inconsistent that he should go so far in dissimulation towards the very man whom he would most gladly trust, and on whom his last hope is placed. In any case this gives us a much stronger impression of the contrast aimed at in the character. His enterprise against Macbeth is in the same way prudent and patient; the hewing down the boughs in Birnam wood is characteristic of him; and, like the predictions in the Winter's Tale, these are also very finely grounded in the circumstances and characters themselves.

Macbeth has always been a trial piece for the best stages. The directors ought only to be careful in attempting any abridgments and improvements. This play is most closely and connectedly fashioned as a whole, and bears no omissions. Schiller has left out the scene of the murder of Macduff's family. What we have already said shows why this is inadmissible. An instance of the horrors which Macbeth perpetrated must be brought forward; the weighty cause which planted the thirst for vengeance in Macduff's soul is only comprehended when the eye has seen it. Coleridge has already defended Shakespeare from the reproach of unnecessary cruelty: 'Leaving out Titus, which is not genuine, and the scene of the blinding of Gloster (in which, also, only the *ne palam coquat* of Horace is violated), I answer boldly, Not guilty.' Even here Shakespeare has done all he could to lessen the necessary severity. On the death of the child we have before remarked. He inspires us with little sympathy for the mother, who considers Macduff as a traitor to King Macbeth: her death takes place behind the scene. Besides this scene of horror, it has also been decided to cut out the comic character of the porter. Coleridge and Collier are in favour of this omission, as they consider his

soliloquy to be the unauthorised interpolation of an actor. It may be so. Yet at all events it is not inappropriate; there is an uncomfortable joviality, which, by way of contrast, is very suitable to the circumstances, when the drunken warder, whom Duncan's gifts and the festivities of the evening have left in a state of excitement, calls his post 'hell's gate,' in a speech in which every allusion bears a point. Garrick has been guilty of worse omissions than that of the customary omission of these scenes, and of still more awkward interpolations. Nevertheless, he was the first to restore the piece to the public in an adequate form. Before him Davenant had arranged it as a sort of opera, with a highly laughable arrangement for the witches, and with the strangest additions. Garrick was obliged in his revival of the piece, in order to obtain a hearing for his new and different conception of the character, to write a humorous attack on himself, that he might take away the sting from the attacks of others. His acting has no doubt been handed down traditionally, as well as that of his Hamlet, which we may compare, according to Lichtenberg's statement, in some degree with that of the present day. When, even outside the theatre, he spoke the soliloquy where imagination pictures the dagger, his audience were transported with his burning gaze, his inimitable acting, and expressive language. Since his time the part has remained the aim of all famous actors—of Kemble, Kean, and Macready. The first of these wrote a paper in illustration of this character. Mrs. Pritchard performed the part of Lady Macbeth with Garrick. Her conception also of this part seems to have remained the standard one. She gave a fearful picture of audacity in crime, of obduracy, and remorseless insensibility. Her acting in the banquet scene was celebrated as the perfection of her part, as also in the scene in which she walks in sleep; her acting here was like the sudden gleam of a flash of lightning which reveals more sensibly the horrors of darkness. In 1785 Mrs. Siddons played this part in London, and she too was the admiration of all who saw her. She looked like a figure of ancient tragedy, simple, statue-like, grand, and powerfully energetic. Her acting in those words where she protests that she could have dashed out the brains of her smiling babe is described as violently overdrawn and distorted. It is singular that this woman, who has written down her observations on the character, appears to differ in her theory and practice. She surmised a suppressed spark of womanly nature in this cha-

racter, and went so far as even to imagine her a fair beauty with much feminine loveliness. In this she was evidently nearer the mark than in her acting. She may, however, have supposed the character more popular if acted as she portrayed it. This manner of acting a given part at pleasure is, however, allowable at the best only in parts out of which the poet himself could make nothing. To attempt it with Shakespeare is ever a bungling business. He has left nothing for the actor to do but to comprehend him; but he has throughout given him sufficient work if he would comprehend him fully.

KING LEAR.

KING LEAR cannot have been written before 1603, because in that year there appeared a book by Harsnet, entitled 'Discovery of Popish Impostors,' out of which Shakespeare evidently borrowed the names of the different devils which Edgar mentions in his simulated madness. We know further that Lear was acted at the Globe on December 26, 1606; it must have been written between these two dates; and being thus contemporaneous with Macbeth, we are chronologically justified in giving it our consideration here. Not long after that performance, three editions in quarto appeared in one year (1608), a proof certainly that the play was a favourite, and that it was equally interesting to the refined critics and frequenters of the Shakespearian theatre as to the public that had delighted in Titus and Tamburlaine.

The myth of King Lear and his daughters is related by Geoffrey of Monmouth, who places the death of this prince 800 years before Christ. From him it was copied by Holinshed. The story had been dramatised even before Shakespeare; a piece entitled 'The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his Three Daughters' was reprinted in Steevens' Six Old Plays, &c., having first appeared in 1594, but having been written somewhat earlier. That Shakespeare may have made use of this rough and ill-arranged play is only betrayed by a few trifling points. In it the old king questions his daughters as to the degree of their filial love in order to practise a fatherly deception upon the youngest, to entrap her into the expected declaration of affection, so that he might give her, against her inclination, in marriage to a British sovereign. Deceived in his expectation he deprives her of her inheritance, and she becomes the wife of the King of France, who comes to England disguised as a pilgrim, and falls in with her by chance. Goneril next drives the weak old king from his house, then both daugh-

ters contrive a plot for his murder and for that of his faithful Perillus (Kent in Shakespeare); they each mutually petition the appointed murderer for the life of the other, and he spares both. They flee to France; in the disguise of sailors they meet the king and Cordelia, who in the dress of peasants are making an excursion to the sea; Lear is then brought back in triumph, and his wicked daughters and their husbands are banished. We see at once, from the romantic touches which are here interwoven, that the piece is much less tragic than Shakespeare's; the scene is laid in Christian times; Goneril's complaint against her old, weak-minded, and guiltless father is that he always scolded her when she ordered a new-fashioned dress or gave a banquet; he goes weeping away from her, and comes with his finger in his eyes to Regan, who receives him on her knees and with flattery, whilst in her heart she plans his murder. Can it fail to strike us that our poet, in a more advanced state of theatrical taste, developed this story of filial ingratitude into a much more fearful picture than the older poet had done in the ruder period of the English stage?

Shakespeare has heightened the horrors of this tragedy merely by enlarging the original plot. To the story of Lear he has added the episode of Gloster, which is borrowed from Sidney's 'Arcadia' (II. 10); the ruin of a second family, the snares laid by an unnatural son for a father and brother, a father incensed against a guiltless son; all these are added to the injustice which Lear commits against one of his children and which he suffers from the others. This episode, connected as it is by similarity of purport, Shakespeare has linked and united with the main action in the most spirited manner, weaving and combining the double action, as it were, into a single one; but he has not done this without greatly heightening its harshness and cruelty. By placing Gloster's bastard son in the service and affection of the terrible sisters, he causes Goneril's attempt on her husband's life and the poisoning of her sister; he causes, moreover, Cordelia's execution and her father's death. These threefold and fourfold family discords rest further on the broader ground of political intrigues. The degenerate daughters strive by secret designs to re-unite the divided kingdom of the old Lear, while, at the same time, it is threatened by France from without; the secret understanding between Cordelia and the English nobility leads to the cruel blinding of Gloster, and in consequence of this to the death of Cornwall. If

this play, therefore, from the excess of wild and unnatural deeds, is more bloody than any other of Shakespeare's tragedies, it becomes even more repulsive from the nature and manner, the form and appearance of its horrors. Even Coleridge, the steady upholder of Shakespeare, called the blinding of Gloster, the actual tearing out of his eyes upon the stage, a scene in which the tragic element is carried to the utmost limits, the *ne plus ultra* of dramatic effect. Not only the mode of Cordelia's death, but her death at all, has been considered unnecessarily cruel. An English ballad on the subject, written probably after our play appeared, makes Cordelia die a nobler death on the battle-field. At the period of the Restoration the play, even with this tragic catastrophe, would no longer have been found endurable. Tate and Colman revised it, and in this and other alterations for the stage Edgar was made to fall in love with Cordelia, and the pleasant conclusion of comedy was given to the tragedy. Johnson and others concurred in this, and even in Garrick's time King Lear was always represented in this milder form, and the killing of Cordelia's destined executioner and the frustration of his purpose by the old Lear were received with the greatest applause.

Is it not a decided proof of the barbarism of the age that a piece of this kind should have been written by Shakespeare, and should have found such decided approbation with his contemporaries? And is it not further an evidence that Shakespeare, however highly we may estimate him, did not wholly escape the infection of this time? At any rate, is it not an evidence that he was only too ready to pander to the coarse taste of the period? We believe in none of these three things. That the age of Shakespeare was rich in manifold culture is proved by its vast literature; that this culture was still defaced by many remnants of barbarism is undeniable from the state of manners generally, and from isolated and not insignificant branches of that literature itself. Nevertheless, we should be wrong in calling an age barbarous, in which the individual could attain to such perfection of culture as that which we admire in Shakespeare. That the nerves in those days were healthier and stronger, that the state of public feeling and passing events was more tragic, that the estimation of blood and of human life was lower, all this did not interfere with the culture, but it decidedly favoured tragic poetry. Tragedy has ever flourished naturally or extraordinarily in the same proportion as public

events have rendered the public mind susceptible for it; a peaceful, tranquil, stagnant period will never produce great tragedies. But had Shakespeare, when he wrote King Lear, fallen for a time at least into the comparative wildness of this vigorous age? Just as little as the man of fine feeling in our own day, who, having given us proofs of the highest tenderness, of the softest humanity, and of the most melting elegiac sentiment, as Shakespeare has done in Romeo, in Hamlet, and in Cymbeline—just as little as this man of fine feeling and delicate organisation in our own day would have done, if he were to undertake, with competent poetic skill, to hold up to the wilder moments of the present their own image reflected in the mirror of the past. When, however, Shakespeare carried the tragic element to its utmost limits in Lear, as Coleridge says is the case, did he not, at any rate, do too much homage to the rude taste of the ruder portion of society, inasmuch as he derogated by this somewhat from the dignity of his art? *If* he had in any wise derogated from the dignity of his art, then certainly he would have deserved the reproach of having unjustly pandered to the rude taste of the masses. But have we not seen Shakespeare even in comedy using the burlesque caricatures of the low popular farces, and ennobling them by the spirited connection into which he brought them with the finer forms of his comedies? And may not our poet just as well have sought for a means of using the horrors of the coarse tragedy in Marlowe's style for a higher moral and artistic aim, making the wildness and atrocity of passion, carried to the utmost bounds, serve as the true aim and object of a work of art? Must not a mind of this magnitude have felt that the strongest poetic genius finds alone the scope necessary for it in the representation of the strongest passions? Must he not have felt that there was good reason why the ancients took their subjects from the old primitive heroic ages, where they could venture to invest the more grandly-formed natures with mightier powers? And is it not an acknowledged fact that Shakespeare attained the highest excellence of his art in the delineation of this unrestrained humanity, in Macbeth, in Hamlet, and especially in Lear? How often has Lear been called the grandest and noblest of all his dramas! How was Schlegel amazed at 'the almost superhuman flight of genius' in this work, 'where the mind loses itself just as much in the contemplation of all its heights and depths, as the first impression overpowers the feelings!' These

and similar confessions of admiration have been made, partly without hesitating at the harsh matter, and partly in spite of it; but it may be a question whether they are not merited also just as much *on account of* the colossal matter which, in horror and savageness of the events themselves, exceeds all natural greatness, and on account of the extraordinary development of the plot.

The object of tragedy has, in all ages, formed a contrast to that of the epos. The epic poem was intended to depict the noble deeds of men who act in harmony with the beneficent plans and aims of Providence, and who are the instruments of fate and the favourites of the gods. Tragedy, on the other hand, exhibits men everywhere at issue with fate; proud, overbearing, overstrong natures rebelling against the restraints of divine and human law, and arming thus against themselves the punishment of the gods. What we here call fate is, however, no blind external force, to which man falls a sacrifice as an involuntary tool; fate in Shakespeare is nothing else than man's own nature. Thus we have found it in Othello, in Hamlet, and in Macbeth. The passions of these men wove the web of their own fate. The higher these passions were carried, the more fascinated was our interest in them; the bolder the transgressions to which they led, so much the grander became the actions, so much the more entangled became the errors, so much the more hideous the horrors of the events, so much the more tragic the catastrophe; on the other hand, the nobler the original nature of these very passions, so much the more powerful was the impression of the crimes, and so much the deeper was our pity. Thus we see, throughout, that the depth of effect in the dramatic representation depended on the greatness, the power, the extent, and the depth of the passion depicted; but if this effect were to correspond, in this manner, with the subject represented, there must be pre-supposed in every case a corresponding elevation of the poetic genius, requiring the poet's whole descriptive power, the whole depth of his soul, and the full extent of his mind. Nothing is, therefore, more natural than that we should see our poet continually advancing in the description of those fearful trials, delusions, and excesses of so noble a nature as Macbeth's, and in all other similar represe[illegible] ations. In Lear this advance seems ever on the increas[illegible] proportion as the theme is more comprehensive and va[illegible] Hamlet and Macbeth, in Othello and Timon, everyth[illegible]

on one single principal character. In Lear and Cymbeline, Shakespeare takes a much wider subject. If in those tragedies one single passion and its development were essentially treated, in Lear and Cymbeline whole ages and races are, as it were, represented. We are not here confined especially to individual characters; even in Lear this is not really the case, and in Cymbeline far less so. Twofold or still more manifold actions are united; characters equally important and fascinating move in greater number, in mutual relation; the actual matter gains greatly thereby in richness, extent, and compressed fulness; and we have only separately to select the enterprises of a Kent or an Oswald, to find what a mass of facts in well-connected order lies almost concealed even in the subordinate parts, though at first glance it may be easily overlooked in the abundance of matter. Both these plays, on this account, are richer in events than all others, and approach more nearly to the character of the epic than even the histories did; and they are, therefore, still more opposed to the ancient drama than Shakespeare's other works. This very extension of the events is the cause why these plays are less rich than others in explanatory sentences, why the actions themselves are left to explain the essential point of the whole, and why the accurate consideration of events is as important here as the psychological development of character.

It is interesting to observe, however, by what a fine and gradual progression Shakespeare arrived at those strong, highly tragic characters, endowed with such uncommon passions, and how he advanced from single figures of this kind to the delineation of them in groups, in the two plays which are next to occupy us. If we first of all look back to the earlier series of our poet's tragedies, we find, in Romeo, the most perfect of these early dramas, a beautiful and vehement passion as his subject, but one in nowise great nor manly; his Richard II. was a weakling; Richard III. only extraordinary in meanness; King John a nature with little independence of character. If the poet looked around in society and history for characters to supply him with that fruitful natural strength out of which lofty, vehement, and demoniac passions could burst forth in wanton luxuriance, characters such as he required for his higher tragical [illegible]ots, he found them as little in the civilised present as in the [illegible]ory of the immediate past. When no mighty wars force us [illegible] the smooth flow of our peaceful existence, we see the [illegible]egeneration of passion only in exceptional cases, and

those in the ruder strata of society; these cases are generally reproduced only on the stage of our courts of justice; they are repulsive to us; and the forced and unnatural effect in works of art, which introduce such wildness into the tameness of ordinary life, has been perceived vaguely or distinctly by everyone in Schiller's 'Robbers.' An exception to this was strikingly afforded to Shakespeare in Othello; he pourtrayed this man of a wild stock in the midst of the civilised races of Europe; yet even here the ruin which this wildness, tempered as it was, caused in civil society, seems to have been more offensive to most people than even the refined cruelty of Iago, himself a member of this society. In Cæsar, on the contrary, Shakespeare found a far more favourable period and scene for tragic designs. An heroic people in a remote age, an age civilised indeed but warlike throughout, disturbed by civil wars and state revolutions, this was the soil which our poet sought, and, therefore, he twice subsequently returned to the same ground. But even these periods were too civilised for the representation of passion in its utmost strength, in its unbridled and untamed state. In Hamlet and Macbeth, Shakespeare for the first time grasped with a master's hand the heroic and mythic period of the Gallic and Teutonic nations. In like manner the ancients sought their tragic fables beyond the civilised ages, in stories of pre-Trojan date, and the fearful history of the houses of Laius and Tantalus was the source from which ancient tragedy drew its richest nourishment. Transported into such times, we delight in the historical record of these heroic forms, of this haughty colossal manhood, of these striving natures, of these demi-gods and titans; we find the wanton growth of impulse and passion natural to these races; we are less shocked at the abundance of cruelty, because we feel ourselves involuntarily attracted by the greater strength which was able in those days to endure heavier burdens and sufferings. Nor are we even repelled and misled by the idea that this species of manhood was in itself a myth and a fable, too far from the human nature familiar to us ever to have had reality; we know, from the well-authenticated history of the Burgundian and Merovingian houses, that such times and such men *did exist*, that family horrors, as we read them in Lear, have abounded for centuries even among Christian races, and that the crimes of Tantalus in the old tragedy are not necessarily, and from their very nature, myths and fables. Into such times as these Shakespeare has

transported us in the most tragic of his tragedies, and in nothing perhaps has the instinctive greatness and certainty of his genius displayed itself more than in this the cleverest and boldest of his conceptions. In Macbeth and Hamlet we have shown how he first brought us to the limits of those periods, as if he intended first to accustom an art-loving and refined public to this stronger food. He depicted in Hamlet a man who had outgrown so rude an age, and in Macbeth one who strove against the approaching improvement and amelioration of such a period and retained the manners of the time. In Lear the poet places us in the very centre of such an age, and brings actively before us a whole race endowed with that barbaric strength of passion, in which, almost without exception, the resistance of reason and conscience over the emotions of passion is powerless or dead. In Cymbeline he has once again represented the same heathenish race, but in a more advanced period; in that play, in perfect contrast to Lear, he has portrayed those rare characters in whom the heroic power of self-command and moral energy displays that superior strength necessary to conquer the mighty passions peculiar to such times. It was intentionally, therefore, that he depicted in Lear such full bursts of passion. It was not by chance that he placed in this very play the barbarities of the Duke of Cornwall, a second instance of which is not to be found in the other dramas of the poet. The excessive rudeness and vehemence of Kent have not been given indifferently to every coarse fellow of every other age. The filial ingratitude in the hardened hearts of Lear's daughters, the unnatural breach of the most natural family ties, have not been blindly transferred at pleasure to other races. Such depraved natures, without a trace of conscience, have not been given to the greater number of the characters of other plays as they are in this; nay, the most abandoned individuals in his deepest tragedies, Richard and Iago, are not entirely devoid of this sting of conscience.

'Men are as the time is,' says Edmund in our play; 'to be tender-minded does not become a sword.' Nor an iron age either, was the poet's opinion, an age in which impulses grow to ungovernable strength and crime to a gigantic enormity. That in this play we are transported to such an age ought to be felt by the spectator at once by the first impression on the senses produced in its representation on the stage. Tieck has said of this piece that the style of dress and costume was a

matter of indifference in it; but nothing more mistaken could be said. The delusion would be at once destroyed, if, in Lear, mediæval houses, splendid furniture, and the elegant costume of Spanish knighthood were brought upon the stage. If, on the contrary, we have narrow chambers of rude architecture, wild scenes and barren views, stout gothic coarseness and barbarousness in form and dress, not without some mixture of oriental pomp, the eye at once receives an impression of the scene, which prepares us for the nature of the personages of the drama. Shakespeare, in whose time the stage possessed none of these advantages, found it himself necessary to make the character of the age evident to the spectator or the reader at the very commencement of the piece, by bold sketches of the scene placed in the lips of the actors themselves. Edmund describes them to his brother by quoting a pretended prediction which proclaims 'death, dearth, dissolutions of ancient amities; divisions in state, menaces and maledictions against king and nobles; needless diffidences, banishment of friends, dissipation of cohorts, and nuptial breaches.' The old Gloster had sketched this theme to him before from experiences in actual life. He had found that 'love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide; in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked between son and father.' His own house 'comes under the prediction: there's son against father; the king falls from bias of nature; there's father against child. We have seen,' he adds, 'the best of our time: machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders.' This is in fact a sketch of the age now to be depicted before us in a complete picture, in which we are to be met by cruelty in its most horrid form, by intrigues of the most devilish nature, by ingratitude in its most glaring colour, and by rage and fury that know no restraint. Special weight is laid upon the fact that it is a heathenish time; nature is the goddess of Lear as well as of Edmund; chance reigns above, power and force below. The best of this race know of no inner strength, of no noble will, of no calmness and self-command, and of no moral principle, whereby the power of the blood can be broken, the impulse of passion controlled, and immoderate desires bridled. All, and especially the best, with fatalistic feeling attribute the acts of men to the influence of nature and the stars; eclipses of the sun and moon bring, according to Gloster's opinion, those frightful scourges of humanity; and to the true-hearted

Kent the different dispositions of Lear's daughters are a proof that not education, not inherited blood, but the blind stars 'govern the conditions' of men. It is only the very worst of all of them, the free-thinking Edmund, who ridicules this convenient apology for our crimes and passions by imputing them to planetary influence, because he alone is conscious of inward strength of will and mind, although he turns it to profligate uses. If he, as it were on principle, gives the rein to his selfishness, it is, on the contrary, the rule of the race generally to follow vague instincts and the bent of the inclination, and to give free course to the throng of unchained passions, without any scruple of mind or morality. It is the time of which Macbeth said, 'if the death-blow were given, it were well.' No sting of conscience pricks most of the evil-doers here either before, or during, or after the deed; no agonised reflection upon consequences restrains from crime; here is no Hamlet, no Macbeth, with excited fancy, with terrifying powers of imagination, with the tender yearnings of an innate moral nature. These daughters of Lear, this Edmund, this Cornwall, this Oswald, frustrated in their designs, meet death without a symptom of remorse. Better natures, such as Lear and Gloster, when their faults bring on them natural punishments, fall from happiness to despair; the one becomes mad, and the other looks upon men as the sport of the gods. Just so Macbeth also, though at first willing to renounce the future when in full view of a brilliant present, declares in the hour of his despair that this very life he had once thought so promising is 'a walking shadow, a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing.' All human nature, in such a generation, goes blindly to extremes. Even goodness, where it does appear, fidelity, uprightness, modesty, and self-rule, are all in the extreme. It is a humanity as yet uncultivated, knowing no religious ordinances, no moral laws, no ripeness of experience; a generation near akin to the 'bare, forked animal' of Edgar, cast rough out of nature's hand. In this state of nature it is relationship that first imposes a law and sets a limit. The tie of blood everywhere first quenches the thirst for ruling and possessing, and destroys the selfishness of the individual. But here self-love rends even these strongest ties of nature. A passionate father, on the point of sacrificing everything for his children, reaps apparent and real ingratitude from them; he turns his wrath and persecution against dutifulness and truth, and bestows his benefits on flattery and false-

hood, in consequence of which he is subjected to the most terrible ill-treatment. A tender father has begotten an adder in adultery, a natural son, who strives to destroy him, and through him his lawfully-born brother. Brother against brother, children against parents, and parents against children, husband against wife, are incensed one against the other in the selfish spirit of persecution, a powerful picture of human brutality. The discords in these families form in a manner the central point of this tragedy, so that we are tempted to perceive at the first glance the ruling idea to be the exhibition of filial ingratitude. But the idea of this work is in truth far more comprehensive, and these family discords are rather the body than the soul of the play. But they add to the horror of the matter; similar things, committed by stranger against stranger, would not have had the same fearful weight. These actions, accumulated as they are in the bosom of the closest relationship, represent, says Schlegel, 'a great rebellion in the moral world; the picture becomes gigantic and creates horror, such as would be excited by the idea of the heavenly bodies escaping from their ordained orbits.'

If we are right in saying that to depict the shock of mighty passions against the natural and moral boundaries of humanity is the true task of tragedy, we may perceive that in the piece before us this task appears, as it were, generalised; that where other tragedies treat of separate passions, this one exhibits passion generally, so that, as every careful reader must have more or less felt, it might be called *the tragedy* κατ' ἐξοχήν. There is no other tragedy in which almost all the numerous acting characters are, as in this, equally the prey of violent mental emotions, vehement feelings, or insurmountable desires. To make this apparent at a glance, we have only to call to mind the chief characters in any striking situation. There is no picture of greater or more shameless covetousness than Goneril, when in the presence of her husband she enviously contends with her widowed sister for the new lover, Edmund, unless it be the covetousness of this Edmund himself, wh[o] after he has deprived father and brother of their posses[sions] seeks to rob the two sons-in-law of Lear of their domini[on] for this purpose secretly betroths himself to both sister[s]. is no picture of a fiercer temper and more quic[k] thirst for vengeance than Cornwall, when he tear[s] of a man with whom he had sought shelter,

tiger-like fury of his wife Regan, who goads him to the horrid deed. There is no livelier image of just wrath, of the anger which bursts forth in words and actions at unrighteous deeds, than Kent, who defies Lear and is maddened by the insolence of the steward, unless it be the involuntary ebullitions of rage in that servant of Cornwall, who kills his lord for tearing out Gloster's eyes. There is nothing which so keenly marks the sway of the passions in this whole race as the moments when unnatural and monstrous actions arouse even soft and gentle natures into a disturbance of their whole being; as when the good Gloster calls down vengeance on Regan for having driven her father out into the storm, 'when wolves would not have howled for shelter in vain;' or when the noble Albany is scarcely able to keep his hands from striking Goneril for having driven her father to madness, a man whose reverence even 'the head-lugged bear would lick.' But above all these single instances and these separate characters the form of the aged Lear, who gives the name to the tragedy, stands pre-eminent.

King Lear, in the extremity of age and desolation, looks back upon a time when he was 'every inch a king,' when enemies fled before his sword; and even in his madness the rays of his royal and heroic mind burst forth. In peaceful circumstances he wears a lordly form and a majesty of aspect that well become him; in moments of provocation, 'when he stared, the subject quaked.' If his rank and position allowed of no contradiction, still less would his temperament have borne it. He was always eccentric; he had 'ever but slenderly known himself,' his daughters say, that is, he had never learned to control himself; 'the best and soundest of his time had been but rash' or passionate. This was his nature; it had become his habit through power and greatness, through the prosperity which had never left him, and had never permitted a thought of misfortune and misery. Such a father fosters hypocrisy and flattery in his children only too commonly [illegible] his own punishment; this flattery, again, in its turn, only [illegible]ases still more his violence and irritability. Natural [illegible]ess, even when of a good and affectionate kind, grows [illegible]atures and degenerates under this constrained family [illegible]d this, perhaps, all the more in the present instance, [illegible]uine filial love of the youngest daughter came [illegible]th the pretended love of the elder sisters. If

this haughtiness of the ruler both at home and abroad, a haughtiness which had never learned to bear the truth nor to suffer contradiction, except from the mouth of the fool whom the whip could keep within bounds, if this haughtiness were a natural imperfection, nourished by the habits of a long life, we can imagine that these faults would be increased still more by the 'unruly waywardness,' the weakness, and sensitiveness of his 'infirm years.' If we picture such a man still endowed with that strength of passion which makes him not only the child but the very king of that heroic age, we shall require nothing further for the full understanding of his conduct in the opening scene, which has so often been censured. Goethe called this scene absurd; I consider it as true to nature as any other that Shakespeare has written. The inquiry concerning the degree of his daughters' love was found by the poet ready to his hand, and he sacredly retained it according to his custom; he did not find it necessary to give it an air of greater probability, as the older play did; he left it to the spectator's imaginative power to explain this singular introduction to the division of the inheritance, by referring it to the manners of the time and to the disposition and age of the king. The old king wishes to resign his rank and possessions in favour of his children; in a character such as his this act is one of great renunciation and affectionate trust. For this sacrifice he expected to receive beforehand expressions of gratitude; the selfishness which accompanied his affection produces in him the desire to enjoy the filial protestations of his daughters, while, as Coleridge says, the rooted habit of ruling changes this desire at once into an actual demand. Thereupon, from his favourite child, 'the balm of his age,' upon whose filial duty he had especially reckoned, he receives in the public solemn assembly a cold 'nothing' in answer to his question, and ashamed and undeceived he gives vent to his 'hideous rashness.' The whole ungovernable nature of a man who ha never learned to master the ebullitions of his passion bu violently forth. He gives up his kingdom to the two e sisters, in order, according to the old play, with fierce obst to close the way to repentance and retractation; he b the remonstrating Kent, his most faithful servant; he his child and loads her with sudden hate in the place love; keen-sighted in his rage, he easily frighten wooer, Burgundy, and endeavours to dismiss

France; he gives her to him 'dowered with his curse,' and he calls down the heavy vengeance upon himself, which is to finds its fulfilment: 'So be my grave my peace, as here *I* give her father's heart from her!' The storm which rages within him at this moment he himself graphically describes at a later period in a manner which stamps him as the most violent of a violent race; Cordelia's small fault, he says—

> Like an engine, wrench'd my frame of nature
> From the fix'd place; drew from my heart all love,
> And added to the gall.

It is a 'poor judgment' with which, according to the declaration of the other daughters, he has cast off the youngest, but this does not make the scene absurd. It is the character of rash passion to cause violent mental shocks without sufficient grounds. The poet knew this well, and he has, therefore, contrasted this rash passion of Lear with the just and well-founded rage of the brave Kent, who, even while his life is in danger, tells the king plainly of his injustice, and casts upon him the heavy reproach—

> Kill thy physician, and the fee bestow
> Upon the foul disease.

This disease is now to seize the old hero; the punishment of his last folly follows close upon it, but the long-deferred strokes belong to a long catalogue of faults, which reach their climax in the act of the division of his kingdom. Now that he has renounced his paternal authority, the long submission of his elder daughters to the humours of his old age gives way at once to the abnegation of all filial piety, and their former hypocrisy and falsehood are changed into open ingratitude. Till now, they had flattered him like dogs, they had 'said *ay* and *no* to everything he said;' too late he sees that from the beginning this was 'no good divinity.' Now the hitherto [illegible]iling countenances grow dark; they now seek to despoil him [illegible]he few possessions and outward marks of rank he had [illegible]ned after giving them all the rest; they now reproach [illegible]o his face with his childish old age and with the [illegible]ess of his plan; they turn the rod against their father, [illegible] in words as they are wicked in deeds. At the first [illegible]he two sisters display no characteristic difference; a crab is to a crab,' says the fool; on a closer is surprising what a wide and clearly defined

contrast there is between the two. The elder, Goneril, with the 'wolfish visage' and the dark 'frontlet' of ill-humour, is a masculine woman, full of independent purposes and projects, whilst Regan appears more feminine, rather instigated by Goneril, more passive, and more dependent. Goneril's boundless, 'unbordered' nature, which renders her a true child of that fearful age, shows itself in bloody undertakings, originating in her own brain; whilst Regan's evil nature appears rather in her urging on the atrocities of others, as when Kent is set in the stocks and Gloster's eyes are torn out. The worst of the two is married to a noble gentleman (Albany), whom she reviles as 'a moral fool,' whose mildness and repose seem to her 'milky gentleness,' and whose quiet power and resolute manliness she only later finds reason to discover. The better sister has the worst husband in Cornwall, a man whose wrathful disposition allows of no impediment and bears no remonstrance. Goneril at first appears to govern her husband, who recognises her depth of foresight, and, until he penetrates her character, avoids discords with her; she pursues her aims independently, scarcely listening to him, and scarcely deigning to answer him; Regan, on the contrary, is obsequious and dependent towards the gloomy, laconic, and powerful Cornwall, who is immovable and resolute in his determination. At the first occasion (Act I. sc. 1) Goneril appears as the instigator and Regan as her echo. She it is who afterwards begins to put restraints upon the king, she first treats him disrespectfully, halves and dismisses his attendants, whilst Regan avoids her father with some remains of awe. But she fears her sister still more than her father; she rather suffers her father's messenger to be mistreated than Goneril's servant. Her sister knows her weakness; she does not consider it sufficient to write to her, she goes to her and follows her in order to be sure of her co-operation in her measures. Regan cannot hurl forth vehement and hasty words like Goneril; she has not the same fierce eyes, her glance (though Lear in his madness indeed calls it a squint) is more full of comfort, her nature is softer and more cordial, and Lear, it seems, hardly trusts himself to penetrate her character closely; when, in his delusion, he sits in judgment upon her, he desires to have her heart anatomised. She utters inoffensively harsher things to her father than Goneril does, and yet her father hesitates to pronounce his curse upon her as upon her sister; a curse even twice repeated

Goneril. The latter receives it with marble coldness, but Regan shudders, and fears to draw upon herself the like malediction. It is not until Goneril in her presence has entirely laid open her own unblushing cruelty and barbarity towards their old father, that Regan grows bolder also, and drives away the king's train of knights; she will have no one but himself. When Goneril afterwards insists that the old man shall taste the consequences of his obstinacy and folly, and forbids Gloster, in spite of the raging storm, to harbour him, she chimes in with her usual dependent weakness. After the brood of serpents have got rid of the old father, there begins a domestic feud between the families. Goneril digs deeper mines, to which the mistreatment of Lear has been only the prelude. She wishes to seize on the whole kingdom, she betroths herself to Edmund during her husband's life, she rejoices in Cornwall's death, poisons Regan, joins with Edmund in ordering Cordelia's execution, and finally attempts the life of her husband, whom she now fears, because he had discovered with horror her misdeeds. Here, again, Regan appears throughout less blameable and vile; she makes no engagement with Edmund till after Cornwall's death; she unsuspectingly confides letters for Edmund to Goneril's treacherous servant; she falls a victim to her sister's poison, being herself clear from all attempts of the kind; in every respect she is more contracted in her nature than her sister, whose 'woman's will is of undistinguish'd space.'

The development of Lear's character under the persecutions of these daughters is the true central point of the play, not only according to the course of the original story, but also according to our poet's apprehension of it; the thoroughly passionate nature of the man, who stands foremost as the peculiar representative of this singular age, is here depicted in all the fulness of its inordinate strength. The picture is painted in such strong colours that it scarcely requires our explanation; we will, therefore, only direct our attention to the most prominent features, which display this tragic hero's want of self-government, the immensity of his sufferings, and the obstinacy of his [illegible]ctions. At the outset, when Lear perceives the first symptoms [illegible] neglect, he scarcely acknowledges them to himself, and [illegible]tes them to his own suspicions; when his servants per[illegible]hem likewise he grows irritable; when the time-serving [illegible]orces them unequivocally on his notice he is at once

transported with rage, and forgets his dignity so far as to strike him. Unconscious of any great irritation, we may believe that Lear in his earlier mood would have allowed many slights to have passed in silence. As is usual after sudden passion, his violence is followed by calmness and quiet. The old man is reserved and thoughtful; he begins, indeed, to perceive the folly of having resigned everything to his daughters; he is stung with remorse at having cast off Cordelia, and he longs for the daughter with whom he would have been safe. The fool grieves over her banishment; this was the first sting of repentance which affected Lear; the fool's jests upon the folly of stripping himself of everything fix his thoughts too much upon the seriousness of this reproach for him to be amused by its playful guise. But this contemplative mood is not long to last; the growing rancour at his ill-usage was already disturbing it, and indignation at the ingratitude of his daughters destroys it altogether. Goneril, after the ill-treatment of her servant, suddenly lets fall her mask. This one moment shatters his whole physical and mental strength. In this and in the first scene, when the whole power of Lear's passionate and boundless indignation is still unbroken, the actor must put forth all the bodily strength that he possesses. His first mistake as to his daughter and himself, his strange reception of her words, his singular inquiry after her name, all these are the first symptoms of Lear's subsequent insanity, the calm immediately preceding the storm that bursts forth against Goneril, which only repeats the scene with Cordelia in a more exaggerated form. Goneril has not yet done anything but asked him to lessen his train, and Albany assures him that he is guiltless, nay, that he even forebodes not the cause of his irritation, when Lear utters the fearful curse upon his first-born, which is without its parallel in Œdipus or in any tragedy on a similar subject, and he repeats it afterwards with fresh emphasis, just as he once more subsequently renews it before Regan. His next sensation is one of mingled rage and shame that his daughter's ingratitude should have thus shaken his manhood as to make him weep, a remembrance which causes him deep pain even in his madness; his next thought is that he will see the sister burn with hatred against her sister, that he will lay aside the goodness of his nature, and violently take from Goneril her share of the inheritance, that he may show himself to her again in his character of ruler and avenger, and, as he subsequently

says, 'do such things as shall be the terrors of the earth.' We see from these unmeasured intentions, which, springing from one unexplained cause, proceed forthwith to extremity, how much mischief this mistaken man even now heaps upon himself, if even his former errors had not been to blame for the conduct of his daughters; had there been indeed a spark of humanity left in Goneril he would have quenched it by this hasty curse. He comes in front of Gloster's castle; he sees his messenger Caius in the stocks; at once a convulsive burst of rage swells again in his bosom. He inquires for his second daughter, who avoids him; he desires to see her and her husband; Gloster excuses them on the plea of sickness, and hints at Cornwall's 'fiery quality;' and this is one of the most characteristic passages, well adapted for bringing out Lear's disposition, when at this mere word his rage foams and boils, not so much on account of the intractableness of his children as that anyone should dare to urge the excuse of a 'fiery quality' *to him*. At this moment he seems to have attained the utmost limits of his bodily strength; the ferment in his temper now subsides, the furious outbursts grow weak. It seems as if he would compel his 'rising heart' to calmness and self-command by reason and will, but in truth this same 'rising heart' chokes his breath; his manhood is paralysed; he cannot strain his sinews any more, he can only fear that they will break; that he has no more curse for Regan is partly owing to this exhaustion; his outbursts of wrath take the milder form of sarcasm; he sinks to softness, even to tears and entreaties. While before Goneril he had had such violent rage at his command that for very shame he was angry at his tears, he is now obliged to implore the gods to 'touch him with noble anger,' and his tears flow although he abjures them. Before, at his first experience of Goneril's undutifulness, Lear had already called upon the gods for the patience which he knew he lacked, and had implored to be kept from madness, which in the aged overburdened man must be the natural result of the unnatural strain upon his mind; now he feels himself approaching that fearful end. A picture of dreadful sublimity and wild grandeur beyond all admiration is now unrolled before us, when the helpless old man, cast out by his children into darkness, storm, and desolation, or driven by his own unyielding obstinacy, wanders without shelter, with bare head, stripped of his last possession, transformed from a king into a beggar, thrown from the lap of luxury into the

extremity of want, and into all the unchained horrors of nature, the rising storm of inward misery rendering him insensible and dead to all around him. The scenes in which Lear on the point of madness appears in company with Edgar, who feigns madness, and with the fool, who still endeavours, crushed in spirit, to follow his vocation, have not their equal on the stage; and, far from being too horribly distorted and too harsh in effect, they produce throughout a deep though not painful impression, if the silent acting of the persons around Lear is correct, if Edgar's aside-spoken remarks are uttered in suitable tones, and if the fool's last words are properly prepared, words with which the poet indisputably intended to designate the faithful dependant's breaking heart. The king's madness bursts forth upon his fearful and dismal meeting with the mad Edgar—a touch of nature, the truth of which is felt without the help of experience, although this too might be adduced. The poet has not allowed the king's disturbed imagination to fix itself upon one definite idea, as is the case with the insane generally. It may appear at first as if this were his intention. When Lear is first on the road to madness his thoughts dwell upon the ingratitude of his children, at the same time the bitter feeling of necessity and poverty oppresses him, and he feels remorse that in his prosperity he had thought too little of the 'poor naked wretches' who, like him now, with houseless heads and unfed sides, 'bide the pelting of this pitiless storm.' At this point of his reflection his madness breaks out, and he suddenly sees bodily before him this helpless being, the 'thing itself,' the naked man, to bring himself on a level with whom he strips off his clothes. Before and after the paroxysms his fancy is busy with thoughts of revenge upon his daughters; the old stubbornness and old passionate nature of the man still further displays themselves in this condition; he wishes to 'have a thousand with red burning spits come hizzing in' upon his daughters; he sits in judgment upon them; he talks of bows and halberds, soldiers, press-money, parole, challenges, arms, and imprisonment. Nevertheless, the poet does not allow the ravings to dwell even upon this characteristic idea of vengeance. Had ways and means been given to Lear's desire for revenge, the satisfaction of these desires would have drawn his thoughts into another channel; in obedience to his principles he would have revenged himself frantically, and thus have satisfied the violence of his nature;

but as his active emotions must sink into passive ones, with the feeling of powerlessness and consequent bitterness, the vehemence of these emotions turns within, and flatters him with at least the semblance of revenge. Yet even now his susceptibility to violent emotions will not suffer Lear to rest upon those consoling images. His satisfaction in the idea of revenge passes only like a red thread through the midst of his ravings, but he continually starts away from it, he has lucid intervals, he mingles reason with folly; at one moment he is dull to the reality of things around him, at another he perverts them entirely; now he is led to observations on remote matters, and now to keenly suitable remarks. At times it may seem as if the poet only made use of Lear's wanderings, as he did of Hamlet's feigned insanity, to introduce general satirical allusions, as when he sees 'the great image of authority' in the dreaded dog in office, when he applauds the flourishing state of sin, when he sees crime in power, punishing its own misdeeds in others, when he denounces bribery, and asserts that 'none offend who have the power to seal the accuser's lips.' But all this is, however, only the strong utterance of a moral despair, strikingly characteristic of the man who, broken by age and trouble, as well as wrecked in fortune, power, and greatness, must in a moral respect also be disappointed of the world, in which he has to suffer much more than he thinks he deserves. The poet has placed him at the very extreme of physical, mental, and moral disorder by the side of Glóster, who at this same time was saved from a similar fall. Gloster's pliant and gentler disposition was only bent under the equal weight of age and sorrow; Lear's strained and strong nature was, on the contrary, as it were, shattered—a nature which, formed for exertion, received a new degree of vigour even in madness and in the relaxation consequent on the failure of its powers, until at last repose returns with exhaustion and healing with repose.

Kent and the fool adhere to Lear in his misery; the one brings about his reunion with Cordelia, the other strives by jesting at first to divert his ill-humour and then to keep him from madness. Both are superior children of the age as it is represented to us throughout the play, but still they are children of the age; opposite natures in a moral respect, when compared with Edmund and the like, yet not purely opposite as regards the character common to the race represented. They

possess a mastery over nature and inclination; they put to shame the daughters of the old king by their faithful adherence and devotion; the worthy Kent suppresses his indignation and sense of injury, and continues to serve his outcast master; the fool mockingly praises him and rewards him with the offer of his own cap and bells for his true service to the neglected and unhappy man; he himself cleaves just as much to Lear; he carries on his jester's part with a heavy heart, care-worn, suppressing his own anguish with songs and jokes. But even in this mastery over self, both, however, appear as appertaining to this age; by their means and their very nature they unintentionally augment the inward pangs and outward woes of Lear, instead of alleviating or obviating them. The fool's strokes at Lear's follies are from the first beyond a joke: instead of distracting his thoughts they drive him to dwell upon those which torture him; even when driven out in the night of the storm the fool carries on his biting satire; and however well his jests may serve the æsthetic purpose of not allowing the spectator to dwell too painfully and continually upon the violent outbursts of Lear's madness, they are, on the other hand, psychologically considered, inappropriate and injudicious as a remedy against this very malady. It is just the same with Kent's uprightness. His just anger against Lear in the opening scene shows him to be a truly faithful servant, but it only still more aggravates the contradictory spirit and the obstinacy of the passionate king. The contrast which Kent affords to that time-serving soul of baseness, the steward Oswald, whom no insolence and mistreatment can excite into bitterness and passion, places the power, truth, and fidelity of the former in the strongest light; but he shows, nevertheless, that he has 'more man than wit' in him; he appears in his genuine and just wrath as unrestrained as Lear in his ungrounded fury, and he helps by his vehemence to increase the bitter discord between the latter and his daughters. With restless activity he aids the king in his abandoned condition; he sacrifices himself, and dies at last worn out with excess of true devotion; but all this, merely on account of his disguise, is entirely unavailing for the comfort and support of the aged sovereign. Thus the final deliverance and restoration of the insane and wandering Lear is left to be the work of his daughter Cordelia. But before we come to this point we will insert a few remarks here upon the episode of Gloster, in order that in our discussion

upon the winding up of the plot we may compare the two analogous cases for the sake of greater perspicuity.

The similar discord in Gloster's family has arisen from points in Gloster's character entirely opposite to those in Lear's. A good, mild, unexcitable man, of easy mind and manners, lax and superstitious, Gloster has created his own trouble, just as Lear has drawn down his misery upon himself. He has a natural son, through whom his breach of the marriage-vow is to be avenged; he has indeed in addition done everything in education and treatment that could provoke the bastard against him. For nine years he kept him away from his house, and he intends to send him away again; he is ashamed of him, and owns this to a stranger with little delicacy in Edmund's presence. The secret machinations of this base-born second son are in the first place directed against the legitimate first-born, Edgar, but they re-act upon the father, who credulously allows himself to become the bastard's tool. In Edmund, Shakespeare has repeated the main features of Richard III. and Iago; he has rather sketched them, we might say, as if he left the character for granted. He has endowed him with outward beauty, which (to use Bacon's words) is that with respect to his wickedness which a pure garment is to ugliness; he invests him with the premeditated wickedness and bitterness of Richard, a bitterness awakened in Richard by disgust at his natural deformity, and in Edmund by annoyance at the defect of his birth and family prejudices. Like Richard, Edmund aspires (and indeed without declaring it) after the prospect which offers itself with regard to the kingdom; he brings ruin on this account first into his own house, and then by his shameless connection with both Lear's daughters into their two families; subsequently, with Goneril's concurrence, upon Lear and Cordelia herself. With this far-stretching ambition, Edmund unites Iago's cold reason and selfish calculation, his realistic free-thinking, his indifference to any means that suit him, his hypocrisy which considers lack of dissimulation as mental weakness, and his perseverance and skill in changing the modes by which he pursues his ends as opportunity serves. He first endeavours to befool his father by a dialogue between Edgar and himself; then Edgar's unsuspiciousness suggests to him to let him rather hear a conversation with his father; he then uses Cornwall's unexpected arrival to frighten away Edgar. As in these instances he strides forward throughout with the security

of a master-spirit, careless in his open knavery, nay, even straightforward in his artful intrigues. With frightful heartlessness he afterwards betrays to Cornwall his father's connection with France, in order to get the old man out of his way. He then serves the British cause so well as spy and warrior that he compels even Albany's praise. This success in arms, however, over-elevates him; forgetting his prudence he ventures to challenge truth and justice in a battle by ordeal, and falls under the avenging sword of his brother. In the dying man one spark of satisfaction is still kindled in the feeling that he was yet beloved; and some pity for Lear and Cordelia is at last kindled within him, though this is only in consequence of a casual mention of their names, and, as it were, in spite of his nature; he dies, like Lear's daughters, obdurate and unrepenting. Such is the son by whom the old Gloster allows himself to be led to rob the noble Edgar of his inheritance, just as Lear deprives Cordelia of hers, and to pursue his life with cruel obstinacy. For this purpose he confides in Edmund, as Lear does in his elder daughters, and reaps the most shameless treachery for his true adherence to Lear. We cannot justify the putting out of Gloster's eyes *upon the stage*; although Shakespeare, by the singular circumstance of making a nameless and unknown servant take instant vengeance on the perpetrator of the deed, has given prompt satisfaction to the natural indignation consequent upon such an atrocity. The blinding indeed was Shakespeare's express intention, but this could certainly have been attained as well if the action had been placed behind the scenes. He stumbled, Gloster himself says, when he saw; and Edgar perceives the judgment of Providence in that 'the dark and vicious place where Edmund was begot cost him his eyes.' Poor and blind, Gloster now wanders about like Lear; led *by* the child whom he had cast off, as Lear was led *to* his banished one; in like despair, though it takes different ways. Like Lear he bethinks himself upon poverty for the first time in his own need, and preaches that community of goods which he had never thought of when he possessed them. 'Heavens,' he says—

> Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
> That cleaves your ordinance, that will not see
> Because he doth not feel, feel your power quickly;
> So distribution should undo excess,
> And each man have enough!

Like Lear, also, he despairs of the world and records the triumph of the wicked, expressing it in that fearful sentence—

> As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;
> They kill us for their sport!

Even before his eyes were put out, when oppressed only by his own and Lear's family troubles, Gloster called himself 'almost mad;' subsequently, at the sight of Lear, he wishes for himself the same fate, that 'his thoughts might be severed from his griefs.' But his softer and more elastic nature prevents this; despair drives the less obdurate but equally abandoned one to contemplate suicide, which never entered the thoughts of the revengeful Lear; thus he would scorn the cruelty of fate and escape its arbitrary will. But from this step Edgar restrains him and becomes to him in his despair a spirit-healer and a ministering angel, just as Cordelia is to Lear.

We have now arrived at the splendid contrasts which Shakespeare has placed, by way of atonement, in opposition to the violent race with whom we have become acquainted, and by which he carries us away from these barbarous times. We see Edgar, Lear's godson (the poet forgot, in this designation, that these were heathen times), the innocent and pure soul, so far from evil that he suspects none, stirred by no passionate blood, driven by no wild desire like all the rest; he has inherited his father's mildness, with a nature more calm and a mind far more versatile. Suddenly surprised by ill-fortune, like Lear and afterwards his father, believing that the latter had cruelly cast him off, a guiltless outlaw, unable to escape and in danger of his life, since all ports are closed and his picture has been sent as a warrant for his apprehension, compelled to act the part of the helpless pauper, he rapidly resolves, with foresight, adroitness, and a skilful compliance with circumstances, to play the part of one of those Bedlam beggars, who in wild attire and with a madness half feigned were accustomed to wander over England. When he first makes his appearance in this condition he tells us in a confused manner how 'the foul fiend has led him through fire and through flame, through ford and whirlpool, over bog and quagmire;' how he 'hath laid knives under his pillow, and halters in his pew; set ratsbane by his porridge; made him proud of heart to ride over four-inched bridges;' he hints that he has been tempted to suicide as his father was afterwards. This trait, as well as his feigned madness, might

induce us to believe that we have another Hamlet before us, a good soul who would rather endure wrong than revenge it. But this he is not. There is nothing in the healthy youth of this sickly sentimental nature. As soon as he has seen Lear's greater misfortune he manfully collects himself, showing himself in this the son of a new and better age, and he is ready as the stronger man to bear his smaller sorrow patiently. He warns himself to be ever circumspect, and to watch the storm of time like a wise pilot. A greater blow awaits him; he meets his blinded father, and becomes convinced of Edmund's treachery. Even this, instead of overwhelming him, rouses him, in contrast to his easily depressed father, to fresh self-command and mastery over his grief and misery. He had just been saying that he, at the height of misery, had only hope remaining, and had not to fear the 'lamentable change from the best,' when he meets a still more wretched man, his father, whose misery makes him even more miserable than he was. But this very moment raises him from the passive sufferer into the active helper, although he can scarcely contain himself for grief and pain. He is to his father, in himself alone, all that Kent, the fool, and Cordelia are to Lear. All that Kent is, for he is also a disguised and faithful though disgraced attendant; all that the fool is, for he carries on his vocation, 'playing the fool to sorrow,' although, more discerning than the fool, he knows it to be a 'bad trade, angering itself and others;' all that Cordelia is, for he heals the inward despair of his father, like a spiritual comforter. He is, in this age of obstinate and rude characters, the versatile, Odyssean spirit which is never lacking in such heroic times, at once a sufferer and a hero, brave and prudent in the midst of the dangers surrounding him; he grows greater at every step. To play this character a man must be 'every inch an actor.' He changes his part at least six different times. At first he is Edgar; then poor Tom; then, forgetting himself while his mind is occupied about his father, he falls somewhat out of his assumed part; after this he describes the immeasurable depth of the pretended cliff, as if he stood shuddering on the edge of it; then he is the dweller on the seashore, where Gloster imagines himself to have fallen; then, after the meeting of his father with Lear, he is again another beggar, and before the steward he becomes changed into a peasant; in the lists with Edmund he is an unknown champion; and finally he is again himself. In these various

characters he is cunningly circumspect to the extreme; his father, on first meeting with poor Tom, is faintly reminded of his Edgar; then, and whenever the fear of recognition appears greater, his dissembling becomes stronger. But this dissembling is not, therefore, induced by a fear and excitability like Hamlet's; Edgar goes from his father's corpse, from Kent's death-struggle, from emotions the most violent, to do battle with Edmund and comes off victorious. Endowed with such self-command under sorrow, we feel that Edgar is able to perform the most important services for his father in his disguise; he sustains him physically and saves him mentally. The forsaken blind man intends to throw himself from the steep cliff; Edgar leads him, but he only 'trifles with his despair, to cure it.' He persuades him, when he thinks to have taken the leap, that a miracle has saved him, that some fiend had tempted him, that he is happy because 'the clearest gods who make them honours of men's impossibilities' have preserved him. Gloster reflects on this. He 'will henceforth bear affliction, till it do cry out itself, *enough, enough*, and *die!*' Lear's misery is made known to him, it bows him anew to the earth, he implores the gods to take his life, that his 'worser spirit' tempt him not again 'to die before they please.' 'Well pray you, father!' says Edgar in his new character of a poor man 'made tame by fortune's blows.' Goneril's steward appears, and threatens Gloster with death; the old man welcomes his end, as the boon for which he had entreated the gods; but Edgar preserves him. Both are near the battle; Lear and Cordelia are taken prisoners; Gloster, once more driven from his last hope, desires to remain and wait for death. 'What, in ill thoughts again?' says his noble son, reproachfully; 'men must endure their going hence, even as their coming hither: ripeness is all.' Again Gloster acknowledges the truth of Edgar's words. Not until his son makes himself known, relates his story, and implores his blessing, does his stricken heart break in a conflict of grief and joy. But he dies resigned and smiling. Over his corpse and at the recognition of Edgar the heart-strings of the noble Kent 'began to crack,' and at the relation of these touching sorrows Albany is about to give way, and a ray of human feeling pierces the soul of the dying Edmund. We also, readers and spectators, go away from this accumulation of woe with emotions softened and satisfied.

And this state of mind is still more increased by the cha-

racter and fate of Cordelia. She is one of the tenderest of Shakespeare's creations, hard to be understood, yet simple and clear to those who feel rightly. The actress who cannot entirely forget that she is acting will never be fit for this part. Mrs. Barry, who played it in Garrick's time to the admiration of our Lichtenberg, was, according to that severe critic, endowed with a kind of holy beauty, with a gentle innocence and goodness, as little satirical as heroic. If the actress is not a person of the highest general talent, it necessarily requires one of such a nature that the unaffected grace and innocence of Cordelia may not be ruined on the stage by theatrical tricks. The dying Lear gives us a perfect and visible picture of her sweet feminine nature in those few words: 'Her voice was ever soft, gentle, and low; an excellent thing in woman!' Richer in love than in tongue, she possessed not the 'glib and oily art to speak and purpose not;' what she 'well intends, she'll do't before she speaks.' The ready speech and flattery of her sisters would have been despised by her as superfluous; it would have been so still more from a sense of truth (*silentium ambit veritatem.* Baco.); and most of all because she had none of that craving and self-seeking which makes them so eloquent. Feminine simplicity and modesty, a want or 'tardiness in nature,' as her future husband calls it, helps to chain her tongue in the opening scene, and makes her utter the fatal word which decides her fate. The natural shyness of such a being to speak before a great assembly, and the perfect truthfulness of her soul which directs her to retain half her love for her husband, combine to cause this strange reticence; above all she is actuated in her decision by a sickening contempt and scorn of her sisters, which she cannot longer suppress. In the 'milky gentleness' of her disposition there is mingled a drop of gall from her father's obstinacy; by this delicate stroke Shakespeare has linked her to the age and to the family character. Inconsiderate action and a certain obstinacy are undeniably exhibited at her first appearance, although they spring from the noblest motives. When her father represents her in a hateful light and touches her honour, and when the King of France, a reader of character, divines her nature, this warm dew, following the frost of her father's hatred, opens her heart, and she gains as quickly the love of a husband as she had done the curse of her father. In the progress of the story she now proves how fully her intention was to fulfil her

bounden duty to that father; she proves also how it belongs to her nature to do what she intends before she speaks. Foreseeing the result, she at once, on reaching France, enters into communication with Kent, and keeps spies at the courts of her sisters. She hears of their heartless acts, of her father being cast out in the storm, and then all the beauty of her inmost soul is revealed. In such a night, she says, 'her enemy's dog, though he had bit her, would have stood against her fire;' she is a being such as Shakespeare in his Pericles has depicted the holy, pious Marina. When she received the letters informing her of these indignities her tears flowed; she tried to govern her grief, but it overcame her; she was moved, but not to rage, only to patience and sorrow; she was like sunshine and rain at once; the smiles upon her lip 'seemed not to know what guests were in her eyes,' still less what guests the letters brought; in her true harmless manner she gives way entirely to the feeling which overcomes her. And thus she acts even in a fatal manner by now stepping forward for the restoration of her father. Henceforth she has only the one thought of saving him; filial feeling breaks now as strongly forth into action as at first when words were required it had seemed to draw back. Hence it is that she commits a second and still greater imprudence than before, which makes her now a martyr to her filial love as before to her love of truth. In this unsuspiciousness, in this involuntary obedience to the promptings of sacred feelings, she resembles Desdemona. At that time, in her conviction of doing right, she had not weighed in what she did too little for her indeed deceived parent; she does not now weigh in what she does too much for him; what, done otherwise, might have led to another end. Ethical justice is in this play especially emphasised strongly by the poet himself. *Where* lies the justice of Cordelia's death? Why is Edgar to have a better fate, when he is just that to his father which Cordelia is to Lear? It is this very difference, however, in the fate of the two which guides us to the meaning of the poet. It is precisely the wise and prudent forethought, evident in all his actions, which places Edgar as a pure contrast to Cordelia. His means stand ever in well-considered relation to his aims; it is not so with Cordelia's. She attacks *England* with a French force in order to restore her *father*. The whole responsibility of this step falls upon her. *She* has besought her husband with 'important tears' to give her this army. He

himself was not urgent with regard to this war; he appears not (and this Tieck and Steevens would not understand, although the meaning is evident) with Cordelia in England; he is occupied with other affairs of state. Cordelia has no need to tell *us* that 'no blown ambition incites her arms;' we believe it in her; but at the time when she ought to have said it to Albany she omits it; she touches only upon the one thought of her filial love. When she has found her father in Dover, she resigns the command of her army to her general; this makes the attack against a divided and endangered kingdom more serious. The adverse and dissimilar brothers-in-law advance together to meet this danger, the noble Albany with the terrible Edmund. But Albany also is far more circumspect than Cordelia. Actually in discord with Goneril and Edmund, he has, after Cornwall's death, the prospect of the sole sovereignty, when Lear and Cordelia shall have been conquered and set aside. Notwithstanding, he declares in the presence of his allies that he separates the French invasion from Lear's cause, and this Cordelia had never declared. 'The business of this war,' says Albany, 'toucheth us only as France invades our land, not bolds the king;' he will now favour him, and use the captives according to their merits and *his own safety*. A declaration similarly explicit from Cordelia to Albany might have set aside the war and changed the catastrophe. But Cordelia, from her peculiar nature, neglects such an explanation. Her last fault is like her first; what is understood of itself she cares not to talk of; that of which her heart is fullest she can least express. So long as she lived and warred, Albany would have to fear that she would subject the whole kingdom to France; this idea, however, or the possibility that a French army could conquer on English ground, Shakespeare's patriotic feeling never even allows him to admit. Cordelia, like Desdemona, falls a sacrifice to her own nature; but the circumstances that accompany her death are of a much more reconciling kind. She is conquered in battle, but she has attained the higher conquest, which is all she thought of; she has outwardly restored and inwardly saved her father. She has come with boundless thanks for Kent, who had supported her father, with promises of all her treasures for the physician who should heal him; even these traits betray that her mind is overflowing with the one idea of her father's restoration, which leads her to forget every subordinate thought as to her own

safety. When Lear hears of her arrival, deep shame allows him not to see her. The daughter stands beside him as he sleeps, overflowing with filial feelings and with tender words. He awakes, and glad anxiety surprises her; now again she has no words to say. The awakened Lear speaks wanderingly, yet to the purpose; ashamed in the presence of Cordelia, he feels himself as if in the fires of purgatory; when he is again master of his senses he doubts anew; he recognises her, and falls on his knees before her; he is subdued into a tender mood, which in such a nature agreeably surprises us. Is there anything more touching in poetry or more effective on the stage than this recognition? Lichtenberg declared that the remembrance of this scene, once seen, would last as long as his life. To me it appears that it alone makes ample amends for all the bitter subject of this tragedy; and indeed the whole of the fourth act of Lear is without its equal in dramatic poetry. When both are then brought as prisoners before Edmund, Cordelia acknowledges that 'with best meaning they have incurred the worst;' but she feels herself strong for her own part 'to outfrown fortune's frown.' She asks her father whether they 'shall not see these sisters.' This, perhaps, might have led to their safety, but Lear himself, in the full happiness of having recovered her, thirsts for the solitude of a prison as for a blessed abode in paradise. The inner life in the altered man supersedes the outer. The old nature indeed is true to itself to the last minute. Even now he curses his daughters, as subsequently, in a paroxysm of his former strength, he slays Cordelia's executioner. Had he lived and triumphed with Cordelia, revenge might have governed him again; it might have robbed him of our sympathy, and might not have permitted him to attain to that peace to which the poet intends to lead him. The death of his child forcibly retains him in that peace and gentleness in which he is to depart to a better life. His curse had once been, 'So be my grave my peace, as here I give her father's heart from her!' It is fulfilled when he restores his heart to her. Over her corpse the recognition of Kent, the death of his daughters, and the recovery of his throne are but as sounds which scarcely reach his ear; no worldly joy can rebuild this 'great decay.' To Kent's contentment, and we must indeed say to our own, he follows his departed child, set free from 'the rack of this rough world.' In his purified nature he had said to the imprisoned Cordelia, 'Upon such

sacrifices the gods themselves throw incense!' He recognised in her the martyr and saviour—the precursor of a better time. This was Shakespeare's meaning in her death; if, indeed, like Desdemona, she falls partly in consequence of her nature, she falls at the same time a sacrifice to the errors of the age and surrounding circumstances. 'Thou hast one daughter,' so it says in the play, 'who redeems nature from the general curse, which twain have brought her to.' As to these angel forms in Shakespeare's plays, to those pure ones who fall guiltless sacrifices to fate, death is but the entrance to their proper home, so to this being death for her father and the sealing of her filial love with her blood is no misfortune. What Kent said at the beginning he makes true of himself as it was of Cordelia; her life was 'held but as pawn to wage against the enemies' of her king and father; nor did they 'fear to lose it, his safety being the motive.'

The tragic end of a whole generation of a bloody race is thus depicted in King Lear. Albany said to Goneril:—

> If that the heavens do not their possible spirits
> Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
> 'Twill come:
> Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
> Like monsters of the deep.

The gods *do* revenge these deeds, as we see, by making the monsters of the race destroy one another. Cornwall falls by his own cruelty, Lear's daughters by suicide and fratricide, Edmund by the hand of his persecuted brother, and Gloster and Lear in consequence of their own faults. When the last of these occurs, and Lear brings Cordelia's corpse in his arms, Kent and Edgar ask each other, in full consciousness of these dread judgments of heaven, whether this is 'the promised end,' or the 'image of that horror.' The whole race whom we have seen in action lie dead around; only Edgar and Albany, the noble promisers of a new future, survive the period of wrath, of which it is said, at the conclusion of the piece, the 'young shall never see so much' again. For the internal restoration of the whole age is also accomplished. The gods are acknowledged by Gloster; and Lear, who had lost sight of them in that stormy night, sees them again 'throwing incense' upon the deeds of his daughter; Edgar recognises the justice of heaven as fulfilled in father and brother; Kent gladly lays down his earthly life; even in

Edmund a ray of improvement shines, and Cordelia goes to her death of sacrifice conquering fate. The past ages of ancient and mediæval nations have produced those great epic myths, the Trojan legend and the 'Niebelungen Lied,' which similarly celebrate the downfall of barbarous races, whose place is occupied by descendants of more advanced civilisation; and from such periods of Tantalus-like horror arise those Iphigenias and Penelopes, who, like Cordelia in our present play, are the precursors of a better generation. With these tragic epics of old can this epic tragedy alone be compared. The drama has not space sufficient to depict the struggles of whole races and peoples; it is obliged to limit itself to the representation of a similar catastrophe in families. But in this narrower compass the task of the epos has been accomplished. The poet in this work, in this creation of his own, approaches the most comprehensive works of epic national poetry, the growth, as it were, of centuries; and Aristotle, could he have seen this, would now more than ever have awarded his praise to tragedy: that with smaller means it attained to the great object of the epos. Though Shakespeare at this time might have read the Homeric poems, he had no idea of emulating these magnificent myths in his drama. At the most his great success was the result of a vague desire to strain the theme of his tragedies higher and higher in emulation of these poetic achievements. He imagined just as little that this work would admit of so bold a comparison, as that his Hamlet would be a mirror to generations of centuries to come. But if the uncalculating instinct of genius in our poet has anywhere or in any wise produced greater things than his conscious and far-seeing understanding planned, it is here. With what wonderful and inexplicable profoundness this instinct was at work in this greatest tragic poet, compared with the grandest creations of epic poetry, we first perceive when we place Cymbeline by the side of Lear. It is indeed remarkable enough that at the side of those grandest heroic epics of old times, both Greece and Germany possess a second epopee of a more domestic character and a more conciliatory purport, the 'Odyssey' at the side of the 'Iliad,' 'Gudrun' at the side of the 'Niebelungen.' In both there is the same theme, the fidelity of a married or betrothed wife, which, after many and severe trials, meets with its reward. Most remarkably the very same subject is treated of also in that song of Imogen (Cymbeline), which not alone in

its whole inward bearing, but even in its outward construction, appears as a companion piece to Lear, as the 'Odyssey' to the 'Iliad.' Allowing it to be mere chance which places these three pair of poems in parallel reference to each other, it is still one of the most profound chances in which history has pleased to sport, and only as such it must awaken our keenest interest.

CYMBELINE.

CYMBELINE, in its style and versification, has always been compared with the Winter's Tale, a play to which it also closely approaches in the date of its origin. Dr. Forman saw the Winter's Tale performed in May, 1611, and probably in this or the preceding year Cymbeline also; critics are agreed in assigning the year 1609 as the date of its production. We also have nothing to say against this date, as the mention of the subjects of Troilus and Antony and a number of other reminiscences of the study of the ancients indicate the period when the poet wrote most of his plays upon subjects of antiquity. This, however, does not prevent us from considering this play next after Lear, on account of its internal relation with this tragedy, just as little as the somewhat similar period which separates Macbeth from Hamlet did not hinder us from placing these works side by side.

The subject of Cymbeline, like that of Lear, is formed by the combination of two different actions, derived from widely different sources, and these again appear on the more extensive background of political and military events, as in Lear. We have before shown a connection between the two plays with regard to the extent of the action, the richness of the material, and the epic character thus obtained. We compared the two plays also with regard to their national and chronological character. Cymbeline, like Lear, belongs to the heathen times of the aboriginal Britons. But in this play we are not carried back to the dark ages that preceded our era, but we are transported to the bright period of Augustus Cæsar, when Roman civilisation had already spread its improving influence as far as Britain. It is not a time as that of which Gloster said the *best* of it was machination, hollowness, and treachery; but

Leonatus boasts in Rome of his 'accomplished countrymen;' they are—

> Men more order'd, than when Julius Cæsar
> Smil'd at their lack of skill, but found their courage
> Worthy his frowning at: Their discipline
> (Now mingled with their courages) will make known
> To their approvers, they are people such
> That mend upon the world.

In Lear we had throughout to do with a race in which the natural growth of passion found no check, when the happiness of whole families was trifled away in the light trial of a moment, and nature distorted by madness and despair required to be shattered before it could recover a peaceful calm; here, on the contrary, in the very opening scene, which bears, even in external arrangement, an evident likeness to that in Lear, we are shown the noble repose of virtue, which even when tempted to lawful passion makes the calmest resistance. Throughout the whole play we see great trials and sorrows, which disturb, indeed, even composed minds, but do not annihilate them, whilst in Lear throughout the slightest shocks of impulses and temptations meet with no resistance. The more civilised age soon shows itself by its more civilised vices. Hypocrisy and falsehood, which in Lear's daughters and in Edmund played only a subordinate part compared to their bloody ambition, here play the principal part. The virtues of fidelity and truth, which in Kent were carried to a harsh extreme, are here tempered with the prudence of a more refined and educated race. We find here only the remains of that earlier wild age, as we there found only the beginnings of this gentler one. From the beginning to the end of the play we uniformly meet with this weaker degree of passion and the stronger power of prudence. At the very beginning we see a daughter, who has neglected her filial duties, standing, as Cordelia before Lear, in the presence of a hasty, passionate father, who looks to her for the only comfort of his age. The curse of this father falls upon her, as Lear's upon Cordelia; her lover, Leonatus, is banished, as is the case in Lear with the faithful pleader for Cordelia. But the striking contrast in the way in which this curse is uttered at once shows the prevailing contrast of the two pieces. 'Thou should'st repair my youth,' says Cymbeline to his daughter, and 'thou heapest a year's age on me.' (How absurd, when editors proposed by

changing *a year* to *many a year* to strengthen this characteristically feeble expression, that is, to destroy the poet's intention!) And then follows his curse: 'Let her languish a drop of blood a day' (and this is fulfilled by her separation, trial, and sorrow), and let her 'being aged, die of this folly' (her love to Posthumus), a curse to which the cursed one will gladly say Amen. Thus the father's curse is here fulfilled in pure blessing, as in Lear it is fulfilled in nothing but woe. Leonatus and Imogen bear their trials well and are rewarded; Cymbeline may well submit to have a year heaped on his age for the joy of becoming a 'mother' to his lost sons, while Lear loses his forsaken and recovered daughter; while in Lear the corpses of those who frantically rushed to destruction lie one over the other, here happiness in various forms descends on a circle of better men; while in the one at the conclusion the horrors of the judgment day seemed to break forth, in the other the piece closes with ecstasy, peace, reconciliation, feasts, and solemn thanksgivings.

In King Lear two actions are woven into one, the similar nature of the two demanding such a combination and suggesting of itself one common idea. It is quite otherwise in Cymbeline. The parts of which it is composed stand with reference to their purport in no relation to each other. Three such parts may be distinguished. Holinshed afforded Shakespeare suggestions for the first part, namely, the dispute about the tribute and the war between Britain and Rome; Cymbeline, who had been reigning since the 19th year of the Emperor Augustus, and his two sons, Guiderius and Arviragus, are there mentioned as historical characters. No source is known for the second action, the fate of these sons of Cymbeline; it must have been Shakespeare's own ingenious invention. Belarius, a courtier and warrior, who has guiltlessly fallen into disgrace with Cymbeline, carries off the two princes out of revenge into a solitary wood, where we see them grow up, where one afterwards kills his step-brother Cloten, and both, while unknown to their father, do him good service in the Roman war. The third part, apparently a perfectly distinct and different matter, is borrowed from one of Boccaccio's tales (II. 9), and from an English imitation of the same in a story entitled 'Westward for Smelts,' which, according to Steevens, existed in an edition of 1603, not seen again since; in some parts Shakespeare's treatment of this portion approaches nearer the Italian, in

others the English narrative. In this tale a husband lays a wager with a profligate upon the fidelity of his wife; he is convinced of her faithlessness by an artful device, and commissions his servant to kill her. Yielding to her entreaties, the servant suffers her to live and pretends to his master that she is slain; she enters the service of a stranger, in male attire, and subsequently meets the deceiver again (under different circumstances in all three narratives) and clears her slandered honour. This story, which had been previously dramatised in a French miracle play, Shakespeare connected with Cymbeline by making the slandered wife a daughter of Cymbeline, and her husband an adopted son of his, whom Imogen had independently married, although she was intended by her father and step-mother for her half-brother, Cloten.

Thus outwardly a connection would be established between these different actions; but what inner relation could by any means exist between them, what ideal unity, such as we attribute to all Shakespeare's works, should link them together, is hardly discoverable at a first glance. Even Coleridge missed in Cymbeline, compared with Lear, a certain prominent object. But this was wanting in many of Shakespeare's plays, without their internal connection and unity being injured by it; nay, it even seems that in just these pieces, as, for instance, in the Merchant of Venice, the exact idea and intention in which they are written is all the more prominent. Thus is it also in Cymbeline. We have only to examine its several parts according to their internal nature and to refer to the motives, and we shall see at once persons and actions forming themselves like crystals into a fixed figure; we shall catch the idea which links them together, and, comparing the idea and the mode of carrying it out, we shall obtain clearer elucidation of the whole, and shall perceive a work of art, the compass of which widens and the background deepens in such a manner that we can only compare it with the most excellent of all that Shakespeare has produced. Very few critics have ranked this play so high; but I know of none who have done it justice. Far from aiming at new and singular views, I am always glad when my judgment upon the separate works of our poet is in unison with that which time and common consent have confirmed. But in this one instance I must differ entirely from the customary estimation. This play has had, so to speak, ill-luck in having experienced no greater success and favour. The wager of

Posthumus on the fidelity of his wife seems, like the story of Helena in All's Well that Ends Well, to have repelled many readers, and to have made the piece distasteful. It has been but seldom represented on the stage. The old commentators proscribed it. Johnson declared 'the fiction foolish, the events impossible, the conduct absurd, the faults of the drama too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation.' Even men who have lately attempted to shield our poet from inconsiderate condemnation of this kind passed over this piece in silence or judged it wrongly. Schlegel was satisfied to call it a most extraordinary combination; Ulrici designated it 'essentially' as 'a comedy of intrigue,' and yet as 'a comedy of fate' also; but he utterly erred, according to our opinion, when he attempted to trace its leading idea. The separate beauties of the work force themselves indeed upon the thoughtful reader. Who could deny the romantic glow of Imogen's adventurous journey? Who must not admire the charming character of this being? Who can overlook the richness of imaginative and agreeable matter, or be blind to the moral grandeur with which the piece is designed? The common aim and centre of all these single beauties seemed alone difficult to discern, and admiration was repressed by objections and limited to separate passages, just as with Hamlet, so long as the key to the whole could not be found.

Let us, then, consider once more the purport of the two main actions, and the causes at work in them, in order that we may next examine more closely the acting personages, and through them may approach the inner point of unity in our drama.

When the sons of Cymbeline were yet in their infancy, there dwelt at his court a faithful and famous warrior, named Belarius, who by valuable services had deserved the favour and love of his prince. Suddenly Cymbeline's anger fell upon the guiltless man; calumny deprived him of the royal favour; two villains swore falsely that he had entered into a treacherous league with the Romans, and Cymbeline banishes him and robs him of his possessions. The soldier, grown old in the service of the world, could not quietly suffer this punishment for his fidelity; he took the unmerited disgrace as a warrant for revenge, carried off the two sons of Cymbeline, with their nurse, married her, and brought up the boys as his own children

in a solitary cavern in a forest. Here the old warrior, who formerly had not 'paid pious debts to heaven,' becomes a gentle hermit, and endeavours in this wilderness to educate two worthy royal youths for their country. Experience had taught him that 'the gates of monarchs are arched so high' that they make men impious against God and nature, that no one can keep himself pure in the high places of life, in courts and in cities, amidst the worldly impulses of usury, ambition, and false thirst for glory; that the art of the court in the world in its present condition cannot easily be renounced, but for the soul's good it were better to be unknown. Embittered by the corruption of the world, he thinks to do the greatest service to the ungrateful and weak king by keeping the boys free and far from it, bringing them up in the pious worship of nature, warning them of the danger of intercourse with the world by images from nature, showing them the sweetness of retired and humble life, and praising the beetle as safer than the eagle. The boys grow up in their solitude in the same simple-hearted goodness as that which has kept their sister Imogen true to her pure feminine nature in the midst of the dangers of the courtly world; true, simple, innocent, despisers of wealth, and touched by no impure thoughts or desires. But as they ripen in years their manly royal blood stirs within them, and urges them to leave the narrow bounds of the forest for the world, for war and action; they are held in bonds like the beetle by a thread, and they long to take the bold flight of the eagle; the cage becomes too narrow for them, in which they, like the prisoned bird, sing their bondage; they fear a void old age after an inactive life, in which they are not allowed, like Belarius, to look back upon a fruitful past; they chase only what flies without resistance before them; they have never known the noble strife with equal foes upon which their fancy raves, they have never stood the trial of their valour; the truest instinct leads them to yearn for a life of temptations and trials in spite of its dangers, and it is the germ of the fairest promise of wisdom in them that they feel the wisdom of Belarius to be well suited to his age, yet very unfit for their untested youth. Thus inspired by this mixed spirit of gentleness and strength, of modesty and ambition, of the loveliest candour and the most obstinate daring, we find the two youths designated by their foster-father as the 'sweetest companions in the world,' and in

their actions they prove themselves to be. 'They are as gentle,' Belarius says:—

> As zephyrs, blowing below the violet,
> Not wagging his sweet head: and yet as rough,
> Their royal blood enchaf'd, as the rud'st wind,
> That by the top doth take the mountain-pine
> And make him stoop to the vale.

Thus in the service of the graceful Fidele they appear soft, thoughtful, and tender as women: the one puts off his 'clouted brogues,' not to disturb his sleep; the other mourns so deeply over his supposed death that he cannot sing. But when the alarm of war approaches they rush madly to the battle, and with the help of Belarius they recover the lost fight, the three like three thousand in confidence and valour. On the first impression they seem both alike in character; on a closer inspection it is not so. The elder, Guiderius, the destined heir, is the more manly of the two. At the very beginning he is the more successful hunter. When he meets the rude Cloten without knowing him, when the latter provokes him 'with language that would have made him spurn the sea if it could roar so at him,' and threatens his life, he kills him without hesitation, confesses it (to the envy of Arviragus) to his alarmed foster-father, and afterwards without fear or reflection to the royal step-father himself, although warned by Belarius that this acknowledgment would bring upon him torture and death. Equally hasty and passionate Guiderius also shows himself when he is ready to rush into battle with the Romans, even without his father's blessing. In contrast to him, Arviragus appears throughout more tender and gentle, more communicative and richer in his choice of language. Guiderius is inclined to believe of him that he plays a solemn instrument of mourning, idly and boy-like, without a cause. When over the supposed corpse of Fidele he mentions the pretty legend that Robin Redbreasts covered unburied bodies with moss and flowers, Guiderius blames him for playing 'in wench-like words with that which is so serious.'

The story of the carrying off of the princes by Belarius happens long before the beginning of our play; it is slightly mentioned at first, and the interlocutors find it strange and incredible that royal children should be so carelessly guarded and so indolently sought after that no trace of them should be found. But we now at once meet with a second incident

happening to the king's third child before our eyes, and are thereby initiated so accurately into the circumstances and relations of the court, that in some degree we can comprehend how this unlikely event might before have happened. We see a king utterly weak, good-natured, easily excited though indolent, almost unaccountable from a lack of all self-will; ruled and prejudiced as he once had been by slanderers against Belarius, he is now just as much ruled by a hypocritical wife, with whom he had shortly before been united in his second marriage; and he is just as much prejudiced by her against his daughter Imogen and his foster-son Leonatus, and in favour of his step-son Cloten, a creature 'too bad for bad report.' This distortion of the poor king's judgment works now as it did before. All around him are combined against him and his misleader. As formerly the nurse allowed herself to be bribed to the robbery, so now the courtiers are all at heart on the side of Leonatus and Imogen, although with their lips they play the parts of the grossest hypocrites towards Cloten whom they utterly despise. The queen persecutes Imogen and her faithful servant, even attempting poison; but the physician, who pretends to serve her, deceives her, making her and her means harmless. There is no one who behaves honourably to the king and his new family, but the good Imogen has the pity and sympathy of everyone. If she also had resolved to fly with her Leonatus it is evident that all means were ready and all ways open to allow her disappearance to be as complete as that of the king's sons before.

The hypocrisy and dissimulation of the courtiers, the web of backbitings, persecutions, crafty disobedience, false trust and true falsehood, which we perceive in Cymbeline's house, explains itself as soon as we examine the principal characters that form the circle of the court. The queen is described by the courtiers as a 'crafty devil who coins plots hourly,' as 'a woman that bears all down with her brain.' The deep design in all her proceedings, her cool unconscionableness, reveal themselves at once when she feigns to her physician a long and constant interest in herbs and their properties, only that she may be able at last to prepare slow poisons without incurring suspicion. Her ambition and love of rule incite her to wickedness, but she uses the deepest hypocrisy to conceal these her motives as well as their results. Nevertheless, she cannot mislead the happy instinct of Imogen and her physician, the unsuspecting

Pisanio is only half deceived, the weak king alone yields to the most unconditional trust. She stirs up the king's wrath against Posthumus and Imogen, she acts with hypocritical friendliness the part of pleader for the persecuted pair, 'tickling where she wounds.' Subsequently she pretends the greatest tenderness towards Imogen when the king's anger at her stubbornness is greater; but this anger also is her work. To unite her rude son Cloten to Imogen, that she may secure the throne for him and dominion for herself, was but a first thought with her; she soon with feminine penetration perceives the firm bond between Imogen and Leonatus; she plots, therefore, against her life; she is glad to hear of her flight. To rule is her whole and sole aim; her own son is but the necessary tool for her schemes. She wishes, therefore, the death of the king himself; she even meditates upon a slow poison under which he was to waste away, whilst she would nurse him to the last with a false appearance of the tenderest watchfulness and care. And yet, though alive, he stood so little in her way! She was all-powerful over him in the house and state. She set him against his beloved daughter, she banished his foster-son in whom he might have had a support; she ventures even to vex the king, and he 'buys her injuries to be friends;' *she* it is who opposes the Roman tribute, although faith and gratitude demanded it of Cymbeline who was personally indebted to Cæsar, and these feelings induce him subsequently to pay it willingly notwithstanding his victory. The king is inconsolable when, at the commencement of the war, his wife falls sick, so much was hers the master mind. When he discovers that she loved not *him* but greatness, that she had had designs against his life, that upon the disappearance of her son, which rendered all these crimes unavailing, she had become mad and had died, he is obliged to confess that he would not have believed her crime, 'had she not spoke it dying,' and, with an expression which equally characterises her perfect hypocrisy and falsehood as much as his touching weakness, he says: 'it had been vicious to have mistrusted her.'

To this frightful picture of clever wickedness and dissimulation her son Cloten appears as a contrast in straightforward insolence and rudeness incapable of concealment. In outward form like the royal Leonatus, if we except his head, he is inwardly a perfect contrast; compared with that masterpiece of manliness he is an unfinished creature; compared with the

poor foster-son, so full of innate nobility, calm consciousness, and genuine self-reliance, he is a prince of the lowest and meanest character, full of the brutal arrogance which even in high station assumes the appearance of clownish pride; a clod without a soul, whose sputtering and blustering speech at once expresses the emptiness of his head and the brutishness of his disposition. It was not possible to devise for the sweet Imogen a greater blockhead for a wooer. How often he consults his mirror, how captivated he is with himself and his rank, how cleverly his mother urges him to bring his beloved one pleasing serenades, yet he is obliged himself to confess that he does not understand the process of love; and we are convinced of this when he coarsely attempts to bribe Imogen's faithful ladies, when he addresses herself with his studied speeches, and wearies the patience of this gentlest creature. Too thick-headed for slandering, he discredits her Leonatus that he may make her dislike him, and he is requited for his conduct by her confession that she thinks him too base to be her husband's groom. From this moment his offended pride urges him to blind revenge; he attempts intrigues like his mother, and ever equally self-conceited and awkward he endeavours to gain over Pisanio; he proposes to kill Leonatus, to subject Imogen to the lowest degradation, and then to cast her off. He knows that his mother governs Cymbeline, and therefore he dares everything. He fears not a personal encounter with Leonatus; he is too inexperienced to have an idea of danger or to have a standard of his own strength and that of another; having no judgment he has no sense of fear. Besides, hatred makes him blind, his stupid conceit urges him to utter impudent bravadoes, the flattery of his courtiers makes him believe in his own heroism. When he had spent whole nights in play with bad companions amid cursing and swearing he broke occasionally the head of a partner with the bowls, and this the courtiers put up with without demanding satisfaction, and if one of the company did demand it he refused it on account of his superior rank. This nourished his rude behaviour as well as his conceit; once Posthumus himself avoided his sword; otherwise he would have met him with the same fool-hardiness as that with which he met the far younger Guiderius, by whom he falls. This character has been called obsolete; I know not whether, highly coloured as it is, it be not the lasting type of the man of privileges and of rank, the

courtier who has grown up in nothingness and has been trained in self-conceit. We must seek his original among the ranks of the military and the squires; there at least Miss Seward, according to one of her letters, met with it exactly. In a captain of her acquaintance she found just the expressionless gloom of countenance, the uncertain walk, the volleys of words, the busy insignificance, the feverish outbursts of valour, the wilful moroseness, the capricious malice, and even the occasional gleams of reason under the clouds of folly—qualities which are certainly quite in the nature of this character.

In the midst of a court thus constituted, by the side of these weak, wicked, and untutored rulers, and from the throng of hypocritical creatures who surround them, there rise two personages upon whom the whole glory and worth of perfected humanity seems to have been shed. Nowhere in any of his plays has Shakespeare so forcibly displayed forms so ideal upon the very threshold of the scene. The foster-son of Cymbeline, Leonatus Posthumus, is the son of one Sicilius, who had served with distinction King Tenantius, Cymbeline's father. Two elder brothers of Leonatus had fallen in the service of their country; the father, overwhelmed with grief, had followed them; the desolate widow bore Posthumus after his father's death and died at his birth. Thus more strongly recommended to the throne and the court than even Belarius by the merits of his family, Leonatus is still more so from his personal importance. He repaid his education with early ripeness, and in his early youth he stands forth as a sample of perfect manhood. Without seeing yet for ourselves the actions of the young man, the actual proofs of his worth, in the very first scene we hear from the mouths of the courtiers his almost over-estimated value, and we have at any rate the speaking proof of the universal esteem in which he is held—an esteem that disarms envy itself. They say he was—

> A sample to the youngest; to the more mature,
> A glass that feated them; and to the graver,
> A child that guided dotards.

They describe a perfect harmony in his character, while they style him without equal in inward worth and outward fairness. Not alone to the susceptible Imogen did he appear to possess the face of Jove, the thigh of Mars, the foot of Mercury, and 'the brawns of Hercules,' but Iachimo also says that he sat 'mongst men like a descended god.' The same man in the

hour of his remorse calls him 'the best of all amongst the rarest of good ones;' he compares his calmness to that of virtue itself, and even the wicked queen seems to acknowledge the wisdom which inspires him with composure and patience. Thus every tongue praises this man, but that which exalts him most is the choice of Imogen. For she is as a woman almost more perfect than he as a man, although she esteems him far above herself. With exquisite modesty each gives the praise from self to the other; 'I, my poor self, did exchange for you,' says Leonatus to Imogen, 'to your so infinite loss;' and she calls him, in presence of her father, 'a man worth any woman,' who 'overbuys *her* almost the sum he pays!' She, no less than he, appears in all eyes as the phœnix of her sex and as the paragon of the age. As he is compared with the gods, she is called by Iachimo, that despiser of men, 'a heavenly angel,' and Belarius at the first glance deems her a divinity, a fairy, or an earthly paragon; corresponding to the godlike forms to which she compares Posthumus, she might herself be called a Hebe and a Psyche combined. The impression which she makes on Belarius' sons, who unite the acute perception of the savage with the tender feeling and discernment of the highly cultivated, is that of a being full of enchanting grace and innocence. To the rude Cloten she appears to possess 'the best' of all women, and Lucius, whom she serves as a page, declares that

> never master had
> A page so kind, so duteous, diligent,
> So tender over his occasions, true,
> So feat, so nurselike.

This rare couple have married in Jupiter's temple without the knowledge of Imogen's parents; the king's daughter, in the aversion of her whole nature to Cloten, bestowed herself upon the orphaned foster-brother with whom she thought to adorn the throne of Britain; she 'chose an eagle, and avoided a puttock.' Like Romeo and Juliet, like Othello and Desdemona, they had contracted an independent marriage. But how different are the characters of those who now take this step, how different the circumstances of the case, and how different the results! From the traits of these characters, and from those of the story of their love, we at once infer that these far more fortified souls will steer through their venturous fate quite differently to the vehement Romeo and the dark Othello. No sudden storm of passion has driven Leonatus to Imogen as

Romeo to Juliet; they had grown up together, he was her 'adorer' from conviction and long intercourse, it is a love of slow growth and long standing that unites them; their marriage was an act of self-defence against the ambition of the step-mother; Imogen, as heiress to the throne, is bound to choose a worthy consort; an orphan in the midst of her family, robbed of her brothers, she seeks discreetly a support for herself and for her country; in accepting Cloten she would have done rather that which filial duty required, but not that which patriotism demanded. Neither saw any reason for concealing the marriage; the king, heartily offended at it, banishes the husband and orders his daughter to confinement. No resistance, no thought of elopement, no despair, no pusillanimous despondency, no execration nor impatience escape from either of them. She yields to her father's anger, she bids her new-made consort 'be gone,' she consents to 'abide the hourly shot of angry eyes,' but her comfort is his life and her fidelity; she conscientiously obeys her holy filial duty to her father, but his rage can have no power against their union. Would it have been more difficult for the adored Leonatus to carry off his Imogen than for Belarius long ago to carry off the king's sons? He thinks not of it. With the noblest calmness of mind he takes a tender but hasty farewell; as he is departing the rude Cloten meets him and insults and challenges him; he could have slain him in self-defence in an honourable duel; he does it not; he does not suffer his patience to be disturbed, and passes him contemptuously, having 'rather play'd than fought.' In Italy he lives quietly with his friendly host in proud patience; he does nothing to reconcile or win the king; he waits till summer succeeds winter, for he is secure of the indestructible honour of his wife for all future; he looks upon her as a priceless, unmerited gift of the gods, and trusts to them to preserve their gift for him. She also remains in a similar state of mind. However deep may be the pang of separation to her, she suffers in addition the less endurable pain, the wearisome urgency of her coarse wooer; she feels no bitterness, nay, she compensates for her vanished outward happiness by the inward blessedness of the sweetest thoughts which link her for ever to her Leonatus.

How charmingly has the poet allowed us to cast a glance into this life of fancy and feeling! In the moment of farewell, when the greater grief makes her insensible to her father's

wrath, she dwells in self-forgetting sorrow upon her departing husband; she forgot what she had intended to say and do. She would have given him 'a kiss, set betwixt two charming words,' and would have made him 'swear the shes of Italy should not betray her interest;' she would have told him at what time she 'was in heaven' praying for him; at what hours he 'could encounter her with orisons.' When he is gone she sends her faithful servant after him, whom *he* with like thoughtful care would have left with the deserted one; this servant is to hear and see the last of him, yet he could not satisfy her; she shows him how much farther her longing eyes would have followed him. When he is away she is solely occupied with him, 'her supreme crown of grief;' when company is announced she exclaims, 'Who may this be? Fye!' She is happiest alone in her solitude. When his name is mentioned, when tidings come of him, her colour changes with glad surprise. She bears his letters next her heart. Before she opens them she prays with touching gladness for 'good news,' for his love, health, content, yet not content that they are asunder. Praying, as she would have told him, she goes to bed at midnight thinking of him and kissing his bracelet; at night she weeps as she remembers him 'twixt clock and clock.'

Imogen has often, and rightly, been considered as the most lovely and artless of the female characters which Shakespeare has depicted. Her appearance sheds warmth, fragrance, and brightness over the whole drama. More true and simple than Portia and Isabella, she is even more ideal. In harmonious union she blends exterior grace with moral beauty, and both with fresh straightforwardness of feeling and the utmost clearness of understanding. She is the sum and aggregate of fair womanhood, such as at last the poet conceived it. We may doubt whether in all poetry there is a second creature so charmingly depicted with such perfect truth to nature. At the same time the picture is as highly finished as is generally possible only to the wider range of epic poetry. Imogen is, next to Hamlet, the most fully drawn character in Shakespeare's poetry; the traits of her nature are almost inexhaustible; the poet makes amends by this perfected portrait of a woman of this artless kind for the many sketches of similar natures in the dramas of this period which he has merely outlined. When he transports us into Imogen's bedchamber it is as lifelike as if we sensibly breathed the atmosphere of it. Not only does he

mention and describe her outward beauty, but we see (on merely reading the play) the graceful movements which so well become her, we are acquainted with all her endowments—how 'angel-like' she sings, how 'neat her cookery' is, as if 'Juno had been sick, and she her dieter,' how gracefully she wears her garments, so that she 'made great Juno angry.' But her inward qualities far outweigh these outward ones. And it is our main business to make this clear to our minds, because she is the chief personage of the play, the one which leads us to the understanding of the whole.

The characteristic feature of this nature, which displays itself again and again in all the strange and most various situations in which the poet has placed Imogen, is her mental freshness and healthiness. In the untroubled clearness of her mind, and unspotted purity of her being, every outward circumstance is reflected, unruffled and undistorted, in the mirror of Imogen's soul, and at every occasion she acts from the purest instinct of a nature as sensible as it is practical. Rich in feeling, she is never morbidly sentimental; rich in fancy, she is never fantastic; full of true, painful, earnest love, she is never touched by sickly passion. She is mistress of her soul under the most violent emotions, self-command accompanies her strongest feelings, and the most discreet actions follow her outbursts of vehement passion, even when bold resolutions are required. We have seen how untroubled and unhesitatingly she took the great step of her marriage when she was once satisfied that it was unavoidable. We have seen how prudently she weighed her duty between father and husband, and with what quiet composure she yielded to the necessity of separation. With this same composure she bears the results of this separation. Exposed to the wrath of her father, to the falseness of her step-mother, to the urgency of the rude Cloten, she endures all with the peace of mind belonging to that happy female nature which can keep unpleasant thoughts at a distance, and can forget the pressure of the present by glad recollections of the past. Her ladies and attendants, Pisanio, and the nobles of the court, lament her unhappy situation—she herself scarcely ever complains of it; not until she has fled from Cloten does she perceive that his love-suit has been to her 'as fearful as a siege.' No harsh word against father or mother escapes her lips, nor before another even a harsh word *respecting* them; for her father's sake she is sorry when the unnatural mother

who had aimed at her own life is dead. She bears no resentment for injuries, nor do suffering and trouble press too heavily upon her. In this guileless nature evil impressions are not lasting, and she does not torment herself with too much reflection; she is led by the most enviable instinct; she has neither the superiority of a masculine mind like Portia, nor the timidity of Cordelia, nor the thoughtless inconsiderateness of Desdemona, nor the cheerfulness of Julia. Naturally cheerful, joyous, ingenuous, born to fortune, trained to endurance, she has nothing of that agitated passionateness which foretells a tragic lot, and which brings trouble upon itself of its own creating. At the end of the play, when, shaking off her long sufferings and cruel deceptions, she gives herself at once to the happiest feelings, we see how quickly she jests and is playful with her brothers, how brightly her eyes glance round 'the counterchange severally in all,' and we feel that this being, fit for every situation, improved by every trial, has been wonderfully gifted by nature to be equal to every occasion.

Temptations are not wanting. There are times when the slanderer (Iachimo) makes her doubt the constancy of her Posthumus, and when the tempter attacks her own honour. It is not easy to awaken her suspicion against Posthumus. Upon Iachimo's first hints she thinks of sickness; not until he is very explicit does she believe herself forgotten; then, sunk in silent grief, she refuses to hear more. Iachimo urges her to take revenge, without saying what revenge he meant; but towards Posthumus Imogen could have no revenge. Not, indeed, that her dovelike disposition felt no emotions of anger; when she suspects Pisanio of murder she calls down upon him all the curses which the 'madded Hecuba gave the Greeks,' and adds her own to boot; but for Posthumus she had none. When, after this, Iachimo explains his plan of vengeance she quickly comprehends his intention, and recovers at once from the confusion of her thoughts; her first word is to recall Pisanio, whom Iachimo for his own ends had sent away; she begins with the rarest tact, and with the firmness of innocence, to take measures for her own defence before she allows her angry heart to relieve itself by words of repulse and abhorrence. And again, when Iachimo pretends that his real attempt was but feigned to try her, she believes him, him whom Posthumus had recommended to her as a man of honour, upon his sole word; without any remains of anger she takes the sting from

her heart, and quickly recovers her composure and courtesy towards her guest and the friend of her husband. A deep insight into human nature is not common to women of this character; Imogen knows the queen, the deep dissembler, who is daily with her, and that for ever, once she has seen through her; but with the stranger she persists in her unsuspicion. She is somewhat slow in believing evil of Posthumus, but she is quick in believing good of him; she feels no offence at the trial, even when she thought it designed by Posthumus, but she does not, indeed, reflect at all about it; she believed him for one moment unfaithful; now that she knows that he is true to her all is right again, and she sees no further ground for speculations.

We see that the trial of her fidelity rebounds powerlessly from her; the ramparts of her honour are easily defended; as *she*, thus far, would not have thought such an attack possible, it must henceforth seem impossible to the tempter himself. But the poet depicts a lasting siege of the forsaken being, and he shows us at the same time the palladium that makes her impregnable. We see her again in the evening after Iachimo's visit reading till midnight, intending to rise again at four o'clock in the morning. She read the tale of Philomel as far as the passage where she yields to the seducer Tereus. This story and the day's experience rest obscurely in her mind when she utters her short prayer, commending herself to the protection of the gods, beseeching them to guard her 'from fairies, and the tempters of the night.' She then sleeps calmly; her fancy is not excited; her healthy blood is not easily stirred by sensual emotions; she had often shrunk with 'rosy prudency' even from the lawful caresses of her beloved one. Pisanio esteems it as honourable in her that she undergoes

> More goddess-like than wife-like, such assaults
> As would take in some virtue.

But she herself never would have had a thought that it was meritorious to ward off these assaults. And least of all if it were the question of Cloten's assaults. And yet it is this man whose 'siege' at length forces her out of the calmness of her passive resistance, and drives her to a positive sally. Yet this is not by any attempt upon her fidelity. Only when he dares in her presence to abuse Posthumus with coarse words of shame, the gall which is not wanting in her composition

is stirred up, she loses patience and composure, forgets her feminine grace, and bitterly repulses him with harsh revilings; for she cannot feign peace and friendship when once revolt sits in her heart. By this one act of self-forgetfulness she calls down upon herself new and severer trials. Cloten now forges plots against her honour and against the life of her Posthumus. She receives a deceptive hint to meet her home-returning husband in Wales. After these outbursts of passion, after this open rupture with Cloten, she suddenly, in her excited longing, forgets all consideration for her parents, and prepares, without any reflection, to leave the court; her impatient questions concerning the one object of her thoughts succeed each other rapidly, each one more pressing than the other, and the last ever the most urgent; her joy, her transport, her carelessness of the consequences of this desired meeting are equally great. If we could not before discover the depth of her love in her tranquil composure, we cannot now fail to recognise it in the excess of her agitated longing. We might be doubtful whether we had the same calm peaceful being before us, if the prudence and forethought with which she prepares for the secret journey did not prove to us that she is even now the same discreet being as before.

From the height of the glad hope of meeting Leonatus again she is to fall into the depth of anguish. She is to hear that her husband thinks her faithless, and has ordered her servant to kill her. When she reads this order 'the paper cuts her throat.' But she does not stand dumb and confounded, as Desdemona before Othello; she soon finds touching complaints and asseverations, which convince Pisanio of her innocence. She recollects Iachimo's slanders, and she now believes them true. To think that he may have slandered her also to Posthumus, as he had slandered Posthumus to her, goes far beyond her apprehension of the greatness of human wickedness. She can only explain the inhuman command of her husband by thinking he has become untrue to her; obedient even to death she offers herself willingly like 'a lamb to the butcher.' When Pisanio pities her, and gives her hope that all may have arisen from misunderstanding and slander, her oppressed soul quickly revives. Her reason knows of nothing to justify the cruelty, her heart vaguely wards off despair. Even now she feels no emotion of revenge or hatred; she has but the one thought of seeing him again and saving him, for she believes in his repent-

ance. The good soul feels only pity for the persecutor, the injured only sorrow for the injurer. She reflects that in such evils 'the traitor stands in worse case of woe' than those that are betrayed, that remorse will seize him when he is 'disedged by her that he now tires on;' that 'his memory will then be panged by her' who for his sake had 'put into contempt the suits of princely fellows,' and that he will hereafter find that this was no act of common passage but a strain of rareness. The reader will feel with what exquisite art the poet, under given circumstances and states of feeling, clothes a fault into the most attractive virtue; how, in this moment when Imogen expostulates with the beloved offender, there lies the utmost sweetness in this self-praise, because of the wounded and purest self-reliance, the injured yet deepest sensibility, the disdained yet most devoted love which is expressed in it.

In this state of despair she is ever alike collected and courageous, ready to seize on every means for bringing about a reunion with him, even adventuring 'peril to her modesty, though not death on it!' On Pisanio's advice she is ready to seek her husband in Rome, to leave the court, her parents, and England, and in male attire to enter the service of Lucius. The poet makes her assume the dress of a page, like Julia, Portia, Viola, Rosalind, and Jessica, a favourite effect on the stage at that time, invited by the custom of boys acting the female parts. In this instance the disguise is especially charming, because Imogen is quite incapable of laying aside her feminine nature with her feminine attire. Pisanio tells her that she must give up 'fear and niceness, the handmaids of all women, or, more truly, woman its pretty self.' In these words the feminine nature of Imogen is entirely described. And this same charming nature she must now exchange for 'a waggish courage;' she must be 'ready in gibes, quick-answered, saucy, and as quarrellous as the weasel,' as all those Rosalinds are. She undertakes this, but she cannot carry it out. It is well for her that in her assumed manhood she only meets with her virgin-like brothers in their cave, and the 'holy' Lucius; otherwise her modesty and delicacy would have soon betrayed her sex. Suddenly at last in the wide circle of the camp, when she sees her Posthumus again, in the unconscious pressure of feeling she forgets the man's part she had undertaken and inconsiderately betrays herself.

How enchanting is she in her brothers' cave, when she unexpectedly meets these 'kind creatures,' who are kindred to her

in nature even more than in blood! Idylls so charming as these scenes are can scarcely have been written again; these scenes, said Schlegel, could inspire a worn-out imagination anew with poetry. She enters the empty cave, confused and exhausted, she eats, she prays for the provider and intends to leave money for her meat, when she is surprised by the hermits, who receive her with their natural delight in all human beings, who are soon enchanted with the attraction of her appearance, and take a still warmer interest in her when with careful observation they have remarked how 'grief and patience are rooted' in her soul. But she on her side also feels herself no less powerfully attracted. Among such good creatures her grief would soon have been assuaged, aye, perhaps she might have forgotten her journey to Lucius and to Posthumus! Not that any feminine feeling had drawn her to the amiable youths. The poet has taken great care not to let us imagine this. The brothers indeed soon have an instinctive feeling that this beautiful boy has more of woman's nature in him than man's; when from a natural impulse she relieves them of all domestic matters, when she entreats them to go hunting, on the plea that their daily custom shall not be interrupted, they say that she must be their housewife, and Guiderius declares that 'were she a woman, he should woo her hand.' But she, as a woman, does not respond to this. She has all at once found here what she had never dreamt of in the world—creatures who in their untainted innocence even surpassed her Posthumus; how natural that on this occasion the remembrance of Posthumus, without her expressing it, is no longer so clear as it was, that she reflects on his falsity, that she imagines the possibility, that the wish arises in her heart, of living a life of innocence here with these innocent beings, among whom she had found a substitute for her uncertain, aye, lost support! But, nevertheless, her fidelity to Posthumus could not even here be tempted! As a woman, as Imogen, to leave him and belong to another is a thought that even now never enters her pure, faithful soul. 'Pardon me,' in these meaning words as ingenuous as they are innocent, the slumbering, nascent wish is clothed :—

> Pardon me, gods!
> *'d change my sex* to be companion with them,
> Since Leonatus' false.

This wish to stay with the dwellers in the cave, preserving

intact her sacred duty towards Posthumus, has its source in yet another feature in Imogen's character, connected with her healthy simplicity, and with her natural view of a world abounding with all that is unnatural. She had remained true, simple, and innocent at the court, in the midst of intrigues and baseness. She could thus maintain herself only by virtue of that womanly property of not allowing herself to be influenced by hateful external things. But in the secret depths of her soul another impulse was also at work, an influence which alienates her from all the splendour of high life, although this had been represented to her as the real essence of life, and all beyond the court had been designated as savage. When Posthumus is banished she wishes herself 'a neatherd's daughter,' and him the 'neighbour shepherd's son;' she would have thought it happiness if she had been 'thief-stolen as her two brothers' were; she feels miserable with her longings amid the splendour of rank; those seemed to her blessed who, 'how mean soe'er, could have their honest wills.' Here in her brothers' cave she now meets with beings who prove to her that she has all along been deceived, that her inward impulse would have guided her better, that

> The imperious seas breeds monsters: for the dish,
> Poor tributary rivers as sweet fish.

Here in the cave she remembers the sentence that expresses her own innermost opinion: 'Man and man should be brothers; but clay and clay differs in dignity, whose dust is both alike!' She fosters this opinion not only from an innate inclination for a quiet life, such as is more suitable to women, not only from the sorrowful experience which she has had of courtly life, but she fosters it also because she would far rather abandon the throne than her Posthumus. It is for this reason that the wish escapes her here in the cave that these youths could be her brothers; then had 'her prize been less, and so more equal ballasting to her Posthumus.' As the royal blood in these brothers longed with the might of natural desire to escape out of lowliness and solitude into the life of the world, so her woman's blood, on the contrary, as naturally longed to escape out of the intrigues of the world, so well known to her, into retirement and peace.

Thus, through that wish of Imogen's to remain in the cave, we obtain a glimpse at the more remote background of her nature; but we must not in so doing forget the nearer motive;

the pang caused by Posthumus' unfaithfulness and cruelty had gnawed at her heart, and she reflected involuntarily on the chance that she might have lost him for ever. Grief and patience, as the brothers perceived, 'mingled their spurs together' in her; she belongs to him still, if he will belong to her; she estranges herself from him in thought, in case he should remain faithless; the same healthy nature influences her even after the worst experience; her heart might perhaps break under the certainty of his faithlessness, but she would not die of a broken heart on this account, nor even for his death. The poet shows her to us awakening out of her swoon beside the corpse of Cloten, which she imagines to be that of Posthumus. She turns away from the sight with horror, and thinks she is still dreaming. Trembling with fear of the confirmation of that which her eyes have seen, she prays with averted eyes for mercy, if there be 'a drop of pity left in heaven.' She turns back again, and her dream will not vanish. Then her grief breaks forth, and her suspicion and execrations fall on Pisanio, who had given her the dangerous drink. Yet even now, after the extremity of horror which she believed she had seen, her pain is arrested and moderated, as if repressed by something; it is pain for one who has proved untrue; this sting remains; and the poet has not forgotten, even in the pathos of this most agonising condition, not wholly to obliterate the pain of this old wound by the pain of the new one. Thus Imogen even now resolves, with the same strength of her good nature, to mourn over and bury the corpse of her husband, and then to yield herself perseveringly to her strange fate. And at last, when she is brought prisoner into her father's presence, among so many witnesses, the oppressed mind of the sufferer is sufficiently unburdened, and her eyes, resting upon father and brothers, are sufficiently clear and observant for her to perceive among the prisoners her tempter Iachimo, with the ring of Posthumus on his finger, and thereby to find the clue for unravelling the strange threads of her destiny.

These threads were first entangled by Posthumus' romantic wager upon Imogen's fidelity. This is the point which robbed the play of the favour of all sensitive readers. How was it possible that the poet could make such an indelicate situation the turning point of so great a poem? How indeed was it possible, and how could it be consistent with psychological truth, that this wager should be laid upon a woman of so

lovely and tender a nature, and by a man who was declared to be the 'glass' and 'sample' to his generation? To these questions we have, in the first place, to repeat an answer already often given: Shakespeare found this incident in the story itself, and he conscientiously retained it as a poetic symbol. Whether it was probable or not, he did all he could to make it possible and true. Leonatus had been in France on a previous occasion, and had there already had a similar dispute respecting his Imogen. At that time he was younger, more presumptuous, more impetuous, more contentious than now. He then extolled his beloved before the French ladies; he was ready to maintain his opinion by the ordeal of the sword, according to knightly custom; the matter, however, was amicably adjusted. The banished Posthumus accidentally meets the Frenchman, who at that time had acted as mediator, at the house of his host Philario, in Rome. The evening before his arrival these men had disputed with some strangers at a banquet on a very similar subject, the superiority of their countrywomen; the conversation thus falls easily upon the earlier dispute, which Posthumus, though now grown calmer in his judgment, does not regard as so light a matter as the Frenchman. A taunt of Iachimo's levelled at his beloved irritates Posthumus for a moment, but he recovers his manly composure until he learns more and more the Italian's character. Iachimo is a courtier and a worldling, whom Shakespeare endows with the affected language of his 'water-flies,' Osric, and such like; in the novel his character is rather that of a profligate of Borgia's time than of a Roman in the days of the emperors. His name sounds almost like a diminutive of Iago, and he resembles him in his way of thinking of men. He has no idea of greatness and virtue, and no faith in them. When Posthumus is mentioned he has a number of instances ready to explain his high reputation, only in order to avoid acknowledging his real excellence, of which he has himself no idea. Harshly to disparage or slander individuals, to speak contemptuously of human nature generally, is not so much his nature, but it has become his habit; he esteems the female sex like a freebooter whom success has always attended. He is annoyed by the high reputation of Posthumus and his boundless estimation of Imogen; still more by the confidence with which he rests upon her virtue and fidelity. He offers his wager, and lays it rather against this confidence than

against Imogen's reputation; he would attempt this, he protests, against any lady in the world. Unbelief in morals and propriety generates this mode of thinking in the low-minded man, and petty venomous envy induces him to offer the wager; but in Posthumus, on the contrary, it is his strong conviction of virtue and his faith in human nature which make him first calmly and then angrily oppose Iachimo's principles and assertions; it is the deep indignation of his moral nature which inclines him to accept the offered wager. Excitable indeed in nothing else, he is so just on this one point; and we think any resolute man who had retained a moral and virtuous state would similarly express his impatience against loquacious vice. To the Frenchman this would have been but a blade of straw, for which he felt no inducement to fight; but to Posthumus it is a great point of honour to defend insulted humanity. Not that he enters with Quixotic zeal into this knight-errantry; not that easily kindled he presses for the wager; for a while he intentionally avoids it, although he does not conceal from Iachimo that his presumption deserves not only repulse but chastisement. Not until the Italian actually taints the snow-white swan of Posthumus, and taunts him as though he must have cause to fear if he gave way, not until then does he wager upon his wife, whose fidelity he could trust for even more than this; *she* is to do her part to retrieve the honour of her sex, and then (this is the intention with which he accepts the wager) he will add to *her* repulse the deserved castigation, and punish Iachimo with the sword for his ill opinion and his presumption. In this moral anger Posthumus is no less the same rare being as in the rest of his conduct. His irritation on such noble grounds shows his previous calmness and discretion for the first time in its right light, and this his ever-tested moderation reminds us to consider again and again the reason which drives him exceptionally to exasperation in a transaction so indelicate. Let us remember that the equally calm and even calmer Imogen, who is as rarely or more rarely excited, is driven by the same occasion to the same indignation, when the abject Cloten sets himself above her Posthumus and attempts to disparage him as Iachimo has attempted to defame Imogen. Let us remember that this abnegation of 'a lady's manners,' her burst of indignation, and her flight, show no less self-forgetfulness in the woman than the wager does in the man. For that a self-forgetfulness lies in

both cases in both steps we will not deny; the poet himself, beautiful and excusable as are the inducements in both instances, would neither deny nor conceal this, since he has so severely punished the rashness on both sides.

In this punishment the faults of both co-operate; the wager of Posthumus is not alone to be blamed for the whole chain of their trials. Had Imogen, wearied out with Cloten's 'siege,' not at once set out to Wales upon the deceptive invitation, Pisanio must have announced his bloody commission on the spot; the verification of her alleged death (her disappearance) would have been wanting, Posthumus would have had time for remorse ere it was too late, and all would have unravelled itself in a milder form. But Imogen herself assists in the apparent execution of the revenge which Posthumus, upon Iachimo's report, decreed against her, and which afterwards reacts so heavily upon himself. The artful Italian returns to Rome and enjoys a false triumph over the unsuspecting Briton. Base as he is, we must however beware of making him still baser. Want of faith in human goodness is not innate in him, but acquired from his never having met with virtuous men. A mere glance at Imogen shows him what he had never seen; he feels at once that here weapons of no common kind would be required. Repulsed by her, and ashamed, he feels neither hatred nor ill-will against her, but admiration alone. If it were not for the stings of a base ambition to maintain the glory of being irresistible, if half his fortune and his life had not been at stake, he might indeed have forborne the deception which he now plays upon Posthumus. He utters the horrible slander against Imogen, yet not for the pleasure of slandering her; he speaks ambiguously, he neither lies unnecessarily nor degrades her unnecessarily. When he has attained his object —his own safety—the experience he has gained affects him, the virtue he has seen and tested awakens his conscience, the shame of his guilt oppresses him and makes him a coward in the fight with Britain, the speedy confession of his sin shows him crushed with remorse and worthy of pardon. But at the time when he came to Posthumus with the report of his success, the latter was more easily convinced the cooler and calmer Iachimo appeared. There was no room for doubt after the proofs adduced; even the impartial Philario considers Iachimo as victor. There now follows in Posthumus the fearful outburst of despair, the dark glimpse into his lost life of promise.

Jealousy and wounded honour shake his manhood even to ungovernable fury, and give rise to the most inconsiderate projects of revenge. He here almost resembles Othello. As in him, so in Posthumus' nature there is none of that superficial, social cheerfulness which is mixed with happy and sanguine light-mindedness; serious by nature, he was continually inclined to melancholy, even without cause. Like Othello he had to look up to his beloved, and thought himself despised for his inferior birth. In both, notwithstanding their imposing calmness, there is a vein of passion upon which Iago and Iachimo speculate. Like Othello with the handkerchief Posthumus has apparent proof at hand in the bracelet. Like him he is seized with a paroxysm of misanthropy and contempt; like him his harmonious nature is thrown into a state of chaos, in which he appears far more unfortunate than guilty. Like Othello he loses himself in sensual hateful ideas, conjuring up a repulsive voluptuous picture of the rapid conquest of the 'yellow Iachimo' over a being whom he had thought 'as chaste as unsunned snow.' His hatred falls upon the whole female sex; everything 'that tends to vice in man' seems to him 'the woman's part,' every crime and sin to be inherited from her. Like Othello he condemns the criminal to be the sacrifice for his stained honour, while his moral nature is ever in the same state of indignation that we before observed. How much gentler, under similar circumstances, is his wife, his Imogen, to him! When she thinks him faithless she loses not her faith in the whole male sex, she only says that *his* falsity will 'lay the *leaven* on all proper men!' She is reminded of revenge, but by others, not by herself, and she cannot comprehend the thought. She has only pity and no hatred for him; and even if her heart has somewhat cooled, she never could have wholly lost her faith in him; she would never have been capable of planning any evil against him.

This, however, does not place him below her. In the man, who can and will be nothing by halves, the difference of sex necessitates this fearful reaction after an experience which unsettles his trust in the world and in everything. As soon as he has given his faithful Pisanio the order for her death his reflection returns. He now laments the fidelity which had so rapidly executed his command. Othello killed Desdemona to prevent her from sinning further; in this lies the delicate distinction between him and the more human, more gentle Leonatus. The

latter curses his act, because, had the victim lived, she would have had time for repentance! Faith in her virtue was only stifled for a moment in him, but was not dead. He is now seized with remorse, which urges him to take vengeance on himself. The same indignation which had roused him against Iachimo, against Imogen, and against Pisanio, arms him now against himself; and it is this severity against himself that must atone for the moral irritation which induced him to lay the wager and to impose the penalty on Imogen. Not in the recklessness of his first fury does he lay hands on himself like Othello, but in calm composure he inflicts upon himself a noble penance. He follows the Roman army to Britain, but not to fight against his country which he has robbed of so good a queen, but to die fighting *for* it. And to die unknown, unlamented, in the mean disguise of a peasant, uninfluenced by the impulse of any empty subordinate aim. He will 'shame the guise of the world and begin the fashion, less without and more within.' The poet imparts to this ideal of a grand manly character the same distinguishing feature which he had given to his Henry V.—he treats *his* virtue, like that of Henry V., as a rare jewel, setting it in the simplest ornament. The moral of this play is the proof of that of the other; it testifies to the poet's reverential estimation of men who are despisers of show and are secretly noble. Posthumus silently conceals his great services on the battle-field, and unenvyingly ascribes them to Belarius and his sons; determined that all punishment shall fall on himself alone, he passes without a word over his greatest achievement, his having with heroic self-conquest spared the life of the malicious Iachimo, the origin of his misery, who lies vanquished at his feet. This noblest act of his favourite Shakespeare has silently placed in a stage direction! But his desire to die is not granted to him; he therefore mingles with the vanquished and goes voluntarily into prison. Not contented with the repentance which merely grieves for the misdeed, he is ever ready to die cheerfully and implores from the gods 'the penitent instrument'—death. Even after the propitious vision this one longing remains in him as strong as ever. Nor must we imagine this calmness, this sparing of Iachimo, this self-punishment, to be only the valueless effect of an apathy which had taken possession of him. When Iachimo confesses his guilt, his indignation bursts forth again so fiercely that he knows neither himself nor anyone; he utters the most fearful

imprecations against himself and Pisanio, aye, even in his convulsive rage he strikes the unrecognised Imogen and again thrusts her from him. At last, his sufferings ended, the recovered one lies on his breast, to 'hang there like fruit till the tree die!' That both of them lose the throne by the discovery of Imogen's brothers is their most refined justification before the world. Thus their love is proved to be entirely pure, and free from all outward secondary views. *Her* wish for a life of retirement is granted, and *his* similar aim after sterling goodness without show thus stands the final trial. 'O Imogen,' says Cymbeline, pityingly, 'by thy brothers' return thou hast lost a kingdom!' 'No,' she replies, 'I have got two worlds by it!'

Hitherto, according to our first intention, we have closely examined the two actions of the play and the prominent characters; but the point of view from which the poetic painter has taken his picture has not yet been indicated, the master-key is still wanting which can lay open to us at once the various component parts, as well as the way to one innermost centre, from which the plan of the whole structure can be easily recognised as one of artistic harmony.

From our explanation of the subject it will easily be perceived that it treats uniformly throughout two opposite ideas or moral qualities, namely, truth in word and in deed (fidelity), and untruth and faithlessness, falseness in deed or perfidy, falseness in word or slander. All the actions and characters of the play combine to exemplify these ideas, and this is really as apparent as the leading thought in the most intelligible of Shakespeare's dramas can ever be. At the very outset we are introduced into the world of falsehood, the court, and in contrast to this afterwards appears the idyllic innocence of the sylvan solitude. The political action, the background on which the two main actions rest, may be reconciled with the point of view we have specified. Bound to fidelity towards Rome, Cymbeline is led to rebellion by his false wife, and repents when he is his own master. The man who in his very weakness is not false is ensnared by the queen, that mistress of all deceitful arts, in a thickly woven net of falsehood and fatal intrigue, and is threatened with the loss of children and kingdom. False slanderers have once stamped the faithful Belarius to Cymbeline as a traitor; outlawed and banished, but faithful even in his revenge, he carries off the king's sons from the soil of the false world, and brings them up to be true, upright men, incapable of a lie even in the face of

danger. The falseness of the queen ensnares also Posthumus and Imogen. Fidelity and truth, and the soundness and simplicity of character united with these qualities, are their main characteristics. How sensitively Imogen expresses her sense of truth when she speaks of having been misdirected by beggars! And there too, when she tells Lucius a false name for her dead lord, and offers with touching simplicity a prayer to the gods for their pardon of the harmless deceit. And Posthumus on his side, when in the most terrible distraction of mind he assails himself, calling himself Imogen's murderer, he corrects the inaccuracy of his words, conscientiously true, even in the midst of his rage:—

> Villain-like I lie;
> That caused a lesser villain than myself,
> A sacrilegious thief, to do it.

As regards the fidelity of both, the main purport of the play turns upon it and upon the calumny which makes each doubt the fidelity of the other, and upon the noble endurance of their own fidelity towards the beloved one, even though supposed to be faithless or dead. Between these two characters move the subordinate figures, who make still clearer the clear reference of even the lesser parts of the action. Cloten, who is too awkward for lies and slanders, and too stupid for the intrigues of falsehood; the courtiers, who make such vehement 'asides;' the physician, who uses salutary falsehood towards the poisoner; and Pisanio, who, as the servant of two masters, so prudently weighs duties of fidelity between the two when at variance.

Fidelity is the true cardinal virtue of an heroic age; it is this which in the national epic poetry of ancient times places those songs of fidelity, the 'Odyssey' and 'Gudrun,' in such natural juxtaposition to the warlike sagas of the 'Iliad' and the 'Niebelungen.' This connection is entirely founded upon the nature of such times, and so far the remarkable concordance of theme in these poems is no mere blind coincidence. In times when everything depends upon the estimation of great military power and great possessions, upon the thirst for glory and the desire for property, when house and dominion, possessions and existence, are ever insecure, there is nothing nobler and nothing more valuable than a true and tried friend, than a true and trusty servant, than a true and constant wife. No characteristic, therefore, of such an age is more natural than the

proverbial friendships of Greek antiquity, the tales of the true vassals in German heroic poetry, and the poems on the fidelity of Penelope and Gudrun. Whether Shakespeare knew this, or whether the dim gropings of genius and an instinctive feeling of the nature of heroic times dictated it, it is equally remarkable that he should have depicted it with such distinctness both in Lear and Cymbeline, as if both these poems, or their sources, sprung direct from the traditions of those ages. In Lear the faithful attachment of the aged Kent is as beautiful as the friendship of Achilles to Patrocles in the 'Iliad.' In Cymbeline the ugly story of the wager is removed to the heroic times of the middle ages; and though the colouring and character of such a period, as well as in the Roman plays, is handled with little of the historical aptitude attainable in our own days, yet the poet (and this was more essential) has clothed the doubtful matter of the tale with such genuine and pure simplicity that his Imogen may rank as an equal third among those old models of feminine fidelity.

Shakespeare's song of fidelity belongs consequently to the period in which the virtue which it extols reaches its highest rank, in which it attains its greatest worth, owing to the continued trials, temptations, and dangers to which it is exposed, and in which it is often in the peculiar position of being obliged, as it were, to maintain itself by its very opposite. If Penelope would continue honourably true to her consort she must keep back her suitors with falsehood and deception; if Gudrun would keep faith with her betrothed she must deceive her new wooer with false promises. Even this characteristic feature is not omitted in Shakespeare's drama. In Lear he has made the true-hearted Kent carry out his virtue with a tragic consistency. Here in Cymbeline he has sketched in Pisanio a very different picture of a fidelity just as instinctive, but far more circumspect. 'Sly and constant,' as the queen calls him, and as he himself wishes to be, Pisanio unites the cunning of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove. His singular position is throughout that he is truest where he is most untrue. The queen and Cloten wish to turn him from his fidelity; he deceives them, and confesses to himself that to be true to them 'were to prove false to him that is most true.' He is commanded by Posthumus, on his allegiance, to slay Imogen. 'Upon my love, and truth, and vows?' he exclaims; 'if it be so to do good service, never let me be

counted serviceable!' He divines at once that slander has caused Imogen to be suspected; nevertheless, through sleepless nights, unresolved, he wavers sorrowfully between his duties. To serve his master with true obedience is more to him than life; yet he cannot kill the guiltless. He makes use of the order to entrap Imogen to Wales; there, owing to circumstances, he has better opportunity for executing his cruel commission, or in other case he can make her disappearance serve to deceive his master into her alleged death. 'He who dissembles,' says Bacon in one of his maxims, 'deprives himself of one of the most principal instruments for action, which is *Trust* and *Belief*;' but Pisanio, on the contrary, by dissimulation maintains his trust as an instrument for just action. As soon as he has gained a glimpse into Imogen's mind he is convinced that Posthumus has been deceived by slander,

> Whose edge is sharper than the sword; whose tongue
> Outvenoms all the worms of Nile; whose breath
> Rides on the posting winds, and doth belie
> All corners of the world.

He now does that which Posthumus in his remorse required of him:—

> Every good servant does not all commands;
> No bond, but to do just ones!

Thus he deceives his lord, and in this again he is honest in that in which he is false, and 'not true, to be true;' just as the physician says of himself that he is 'the truer, so to be false with the queen.' In the self-satisfaction and security with which Pisanio practises these deceptions, only that he may venture to be true where justice and a higher duty demand it, he does not err; he is heedless of the danger which threatens him at court; he silently endures the abhorrence of the mistaken Imogen and the execrations of Posthumus; he is rewarded by his good conscience for having done the right.

If we closely examine this position of Pisanio, the ingenious purport of the play becomes more and more extended; it gains in universal significance and moral depth, beyond perhaps any other of Shakespeare's works; and if Lear may be regarded as a representation of passion generally, Cymbeline may be called a representation of the common course of the world in which man with his powers and impulses is placed. It is a charac-

teristic of Shakespeare's ideas and empirical system of morals, and an ordinary tenet in his worldly wisdom, that cases and circumstances not unfrequently occur to men, in which virtue becomes vice and vice virtue—as Pisanio here, in all his truth, cannot avoid repaying false actions with falsehood, and punishing false judgment with untruth, maintaining in this very falsity the highest fidelity. Our poet's conviction has been throughout that no outward law can embody the rule of moral action in strict and ever available precepts, but that there is an inner law and feeling which ought to guide us according to case and circumstance in adding or taking away from the letter of duty; that self-reliance and self-consciousness should be purified and developed within us in order that we may be ever a living law and a true judge for ourselves in the doubtful perplexities of the moment. To that simple-natured Pisanio there was no sin in a harmless concealment, a healthful dissimulation, a necessary falsehood, and a necessary deception, compelled by the pressure of circumstances and the condition of the world around him. It is not possible to remain good, true, and faithful among the wicked and the false, without involving personal ruin; this experience Pisanio drew with simple tact from his intercourse with men and his knowledge of them. To remain pure and inoffensive as a hermit in a bad world would only be possible by separating from the world and living *as* a hermit. In this situation the poet has shown us the two sons of Cymbeline. But even these are driven by the impetus of human nature into the dangers and temptations of life; they love not 'the passive virtue, which procures innocence, but not merit' (Bacon); they risk the paternal blessing in this impulse for action, and their first collision with the world would have brought them into the most dangerous complications had not Providence favourably interposed. The poet has shown us, therefore, more perfect characters, who remained uninjured in the midst of the whirlpool of the world. We have seen how the moral purity of Imogen and Posthumus was regarded as blameless both at home and abroad. Yet even these perfect beings were to be defiled with the rancour of the world, their virtue was to be tempted and calumniated, their prudence shaken, their internal peace was to be destroyed with their external prosperity; even they were to discover that it is not possible to keep unspotted in the world. Even if in these exceptions of humanity such an inner power were imaginable

as would render them in themselves secure from all temptation to evil, yet the world without would expose them to it. The slanderer forces himself on Posthumus; he represents to him as false that on which he had placed his highest confidence, he robs him of his good and trustful nature; Posthumus now errs with the best intentions, exercising an over-hasty and inconsiderate justice, which, as he subsequently says, had it been employed against his *own* faults, he had 'never lived to put on' this revenge. Imogen was deprived of her beloved, her patience was irritated, her longing desires overstrained; she flees in the hope of seeing her husband, and of saving him when she believes him faithless; both are excusable, even praiseworthy intentions, but they render deceptions, disguises, evasions, lies, and endangered modesty unavoidable; characteristically enough she is obliged to conceal and preserve her fidelity under the false, but characteristic, name of Fidele. Imogen's spotless nature struggles against all this, but the pressure of circumstances forces it upon her. The poison of the world breathes on these purest mirrors of virtue; suspicion and mistrust, so contrary to their nature, seize them, trials befall them, and temptations in their worst form, armed with misfortune and despair, beset them, but they maintain inviolate their fidelity, against which all these strokes are aimed. And this it is, and this alone, which at last overcomes misfortune and wickedness: that we do not shape our own course after that of the world, that we do not let the vices of others tempt us to our own nor believe them excusable. 'By constancy,' says Bacon, 'fate and fortune return like Proteus to their former being.' Faithlessness, in revenge for faithlessness, as recommended by Iachimo to Imogen, would have for ever destroyed the love and happiness of both; the true constancy of both, in spite of the supposed falsehood of each, surmounted the wicked report and even the incurable evil—the supposed death. And this constancy under such heavy trials acquires a different purity and a different splendour *after* the sorrow and defilement than *before* it. For the events of our play preach this lesson also loudly and distinctly: that virtue when tried, even if it has wavered, has a much higher value than that which is unshaken and untempted. This wisdom slumbers in the craving for the world exhibited by Cymbeline's boys; it lies deeply buried in the much-attacked wager of Posthumus; for a man would only stake upon such a trial the dearest being whom he possessed,

and the tried one would only stand the test like Imogen, when it lies in the innermost conviction of both that genuine virtue ought not to shrink from any trial, not even from the most painful. This lesson is taught also in the position which Shakespeare has given to Cymbeline, whose name stands not by mere chance as the title of the drama. In the midst of all these tempting and tempted agents stands the weak king, without self-reliance, the image of a subordinate character, the sport of every good or bad influence, tossed about by every temptation or suggestion, bent by every wind, but not like the tree at the same time strengthened. He is a mere cipher, receiving value only from the higher or lower figure placed before it; we cannot impute the evil to him, to which he has been instigated by those whom he esteems wise and good, any more than the good which happens without his choice and without his interference. If we consider, also, the contrast in which the poet has placed this character to that of the tried sufferers, our play becomes, as it were, a poetic theodicy; it justifies the impulse to evil which lies within us, and the struggle with external evil imposed upon us, by rendering perceptible in those opposite examples that goodness which has not overcome in the struggle with evil is worthless, and that there can be no virtue without vice. The poet has brought down the gods themselves to the complaining shadows of Posthumus' parents and to the couch of the sleeping sufferer, in order to explain to them this meaning of our play, and to announce expressly to them that which Posthumus had already learnt by his own penetration and others by experience: that the gods decree evil for the trial of the good; that 'some falls are means the happier to arise;' that 'fortune brings in some boats that are not steered;' that God loves him best whom he crosses, 'to make his gift, the more delayed, delighted;' that consequently only tried virtue, ripened by its contact with evil, is worthy of love; that the dearest of the world's sons are not exempt from its shocks and blows, but by resisting its temptations they strengthen their inner worth. Shakespeare here allows the rules of the world to mix personally in the drama, as is usual in the epos, where the actors are in harmony with the divinity and his laws. This epic character and the happy termination of the epos were necessarily given to this drama also. For the personages who here act and err are friends and favourites of the gods,

because even that which in calm certainty or uncertain passion they do, contrary to the maxims of morality, is done from moral motives or in moral indignation; so that the drama with a tragic ending would have been an impeachment of the world's government. Hence I do not think that Shakespeare would have admitted the introduction of Jupiter to be a blunder, as Ulrici calls it, or that he needs Tieck's apology, that this scene was a fragment of a youthful attempt at this play. Far rather does it appear to me that the introduction of the divinity in this dramatised epos testifies to the same deep and remarkable instinct with which Shakespeare entered into the nature of poetry and its various styles and requirements—an instinct of which the preparation of the historical ground in the last two plays was another proof. The poet used the advantage afforded him by this introduction of Providence in a bodily form to carry on the history in some points by means of unexpected incidents; the miraculous power thus introduced neutralises the wonder of the incident, which Shakespeare otherwise nowhere permits himself to employ. This machinery of Providence, however, in nowise impedes the free movement of the actors. And that which might appear arbitrary in the combination of the outward events is more than counterbalanced by the inimitable unravelling of the wonderfully intricate knots at the conclusion of the play. This even found favour with Johnson; it is so rich in distinctness that the poet seems to applaud himself for it, when he makes Cymbeline say:—

> This fierce abridgment,
> Hath to it circumstantial branches, which
> Distinction should be rich in.

A single passage will show this—that one, for instance, in which Imogen, leaning upon Posthumus, 'like harmless lightning throws her eye' on him, her brothers, and her father, 'hitting each object with a joy, the counterchange severally in all.' This passage imparts life and satisfaction to the scene when represented, and when read it makes us thoroughly understand the necessity of *seeing* Shakespeare represented, and is a complete commentary upon it.

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.

In the tragedies last discussed we have seen Shakespeare's genius at its highest point. When in our introductory remarks we placed Shakespeare as the tragic poet of modern times in the same rank that Homer occupied among the epic poets of antiquity, we felt that this high appreciation was justified by the grandeur of these very works, quite apart from Shakespeare's historical position as regards modern dramatic poetry. By leading us back in these plays to a race of men among whom passion has not been extinguished by refinement and over-refinement, Shakespeare has given to tragedy, in spite of its ideal character, somewhat of the naïve and original nature which is the essential property of the popular unartificial epos; by collecting his materials from all the periods and provinces of history, and maintaining in each, as far as possible, its nature and character, he has linked with this first attainment a second utterly denied to this very epos; by raising its designs higher, by extending them further, and by grounding them deeper, he so widened the poetic limits of tragedy that he rendered it possible for this branch of art to venture upon the fullest subject, for the treatment of which the wide range of the epos had formerly been considered indispensable. In this sense Shakespeare might have ventured to rank himself with the father of poetry, with whom we have placed him in comparison, if he could, like us, have reviewed historically the relation of his modern tragedy to the old epos.

It seems to us not altogether impossible that Shakespeare's consciousness of power actually incited him to place himself immediately by the side of Homer in one of his works, and indeed to contrast himself with him. Homer's 'Iliad' was translated by Chapman about 1598, and was published in separate parts. We have already taken occasion to mention this work with praise. With respect to a true rendering of the

original, it would have almost the same importance at that day as Voss's translation had in ours. With the same unlimited love and devotion as Voss, Chapman, contrary to the general opinion of these days, elevated the Greek bard far above all poets; he maintained of him, contrary to the old proverb, that he 'never slept,' that he was entirely harmonious and uniform throughout, that he neither deserved nor suited praise mingled with blame. Even our own Goethe in his youth did not appreciate the grandeur of Homer, being spoiled and attracted by the lighter reading of Virgil; may not a similar reason have repelled Shakespeare also, to whom Chapman's translation could have been as little unknown as Voss's was to our Goethe and Schiller? And in Shakespeare's case the Virgilian ideal could not so easily be *supplanted* by the translation of Homer as in that of our own great poets, either as regards the essential merits or the material import of the poetry. For even so faithful a translation as Chapman's could not keep close to the strict form of the Greek epic; the period itself was not capable of being as susceptible to the great simplicity of the Homeric poems as our own age. Chapman himself thought at times that he could improve upon the old poet by the insertion of a phrase or a conceit, and found it necessary to defend his naïve images here and there by imputing them to irony, which was utterly foreign to Homer. The nature of the poetry, the form of the transposition, and the character of the English language did not allow Chapman the victorious truthfulness of Voss's translation; still more, however, the subject was an impediment in permitting Homer at that time to have the same imposing effect even upon a Shakespeare which he produced upon our German poets. From the nature of our German people our sympathies will ever more incline us to Greek art and culture than to Roman; in England the reverse is the case, and it was so then. At that time the people learned from the stage the origin of the Britons from Trojan blood; this was readily believed at a time when critical doubts were little esteemed; even our poet himself was pleased with the idea of the common origin of the Britons and Romans from the one Trojan source—those two nations whose history and political nature bear so striking a resemblance to each other. Shakespeare himself, even though the form of the Homeric poem may have attracted him, would always have been provoked by its subject-matter to take the adverse side; we have often alleged

how early he adopted the Virgilian view in the Trojan legend, and how deeply Trojan sympathies were rooted in him. If it be thought that the translation of Homer incited him to any poetic, perhaps, indeed, any rival work (and this would have been as natural as that our own Goethe should be spurred by Homer to rival him in epic pieces), he would not, like Goethe, have been tempted to follow in his track, but rather to take an opposite one. And we may well believe that this was really his intention in Troilus and Cressida.

It is not of course possible actually to prove this. It might indeed be disputed whether Shakespeare was acquainted with Chapman's translation at all. We think, however, the sum of our observations will incline to this conjecture, although we shall carefully avoid asserting it otherwise than as a conjecture.

Shakespeare's Troilus was printed in 1609, even before it was acted; this alone is indeed proof sufficient that it was not written much earlier. An older piece about Troilus and Cressida, which was written by Chettle and Decker about 1599, is lost; probably Shakespeare made use of this work for his comedy; indeed Dyce even supposes that in parts, especially near the end, this previous work of inferior poets is still apparent in our poet's play. The subject was much in favour in that lascivious age. We know of three ballads in the sixteenth century which treated this same matter, one of which has been preserved and has been published by Halliwell. The common source of all these poems and plays is Chaucer's Troilus and Cressida, a poem in seven-lined stanzas, and one of the most popular stories down to the time of Elizabeth. The faithfulness of Troilus, the unfaithfulness of Cressida, appear, according to Chaucer's intimation, to have become proverbial as early as his time, and the name of Pandarus has ever been retained in the English language as the designation of a bawd. Chaucer found the complete sketch of his story in the old Trojan romances; but he names as his source a Latin original by one Lollius; its position with regard to it we know not; it is more certain that the 'Filostrato' of Boccaccio influenced his performance. Completely in the style of this Italian narrative, Chaucer's poem carries the simple story of Troilus' love through five long cantos, with such a mixture of earnest pathos and naïve humour that we can hardly tell whether he means his 'little tragedy' in jest or earnest. Troilus appears in it at

first as a despiser of love, and then falls desperately in love with Cressida, whom Chaucer represents as an honourable and virtuous widow, and whose name is venerated among the people; Pandarus acts as the go-between in their affairs, dexterous, busy, teasing, much in the character of a pander, although the story (we doubt also here whether in earnest or irony) makes Troilus solemnly declare that he considers the uncle's services nothing else than goodness, pity, and friendship. Cressida's departure from Troy, and her abandonment of Troilus immediately afterwards, seem to Chaucer rather a theme for sorrow than a matter of wantonness; he endeavours to excuse her faithlessness on the grounds of her helplessness, and the danger to which Troy was exposed; he says he need not blame her further, as her name is so notorious already that this is punishment sufficient for her guilt.

If Shakespeare had wished to handle this subject, as Chaucer did, for its own sake, he had in Troilus the choice of depicting wasted fidelity tragically, or of giving the matter a comic aspect by making his foolish confidence the main point of his character, and by so representing Cressida from the first that he would have no occasion to wonder, like Chaucer, at her sudden faithlessness, or rather at his own inadequate characterisation, establishing the connection between the two upon the shallow and artificial mediation of Pandarus. Shakespeare conceived the subject in his play from this comic view, and in his masterly manner he stamped upon the various circumstances the impress of great psychological knowledge, which they entirely lack in Chaucer. The manager of the contract appears here far more distinctly than in Chaucer to be a practised master in the business. Worthless himself, and therefore willingly occupied for others, polite and cringing, foolish, like a member of Polonius' family, inquisitive, chattering, an adept in double meanings, habituated to lies, bragging, and perjury, he understands thoroughly how to rouse and goad the passions by turns with praise and jealousy, fanning the flame even when already burning clear enough, making the fool more foolish, and the wanton still more wanton. He does too much for the crafty woman; he is too noisily officious for her; for the impatient Troilus he can hardly do enough. This youth of three and twenty, with the first down on his chin, is endowed by Shakespeare with the fanciful first love of boyhood, in which ardent sensuality and the madness of desire are hidden

under boldness of spirit and romantic courage. He idealises not only the beauty of his chosen one but her manners also; he will stake his life that there is no spot in her heart, and he finds the alluring coquette 'stubborn chaste against all suit;' he even idealises the pressing pander as a 'tetchy' man, who must 'be woo'd to woo.' In his choice he makes use of no trial or consideration. The best of tempers, honourable and straightforward, he speaks of himself, as indeed he is,

> as true as truth's simplicity,
> And simpler than the infancy of truth.

Open and free in heart and hand, he gives what he has and shows what he thinks. To persist in his love with an 'eternal and fixed soul,' to be a pattern, a proverbial word for fidelity, this is his ambition; the moral of all his wit is 'plain and true;' that shall be his glory; that is, as he says, taking all together—his 'vice!' To this noble youth Pandarus now leads the artful woman, whom only the crafty Ulysses can see through at a glance. Ulysses observes in a moment what the poor Troilus had never discovered:—

> There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
> Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out
> At every joint and motive of her body.
> O these encounterers, so glib of tongue,
> That wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts
> To every reader;

except alone to the good Troilus. The poet has endeavoured at first to deceive the reader as well as honest Troilus as to Cressida's character, or to keep him uncertain. She appears at first in company with her uncle, she displays a light but not unequal wit, she is, however, without depth, an adept at double entendre, and indelicate in her expressions. She betrays almost at once that she could say more in praise of Troilus than Pandarus does, that she, however, 'holds off,' in order to attract them more methodically, because she knows 'men prize the thing ungain'd more than it is.' In her intercourse with Troilus she maintains her reserve in practice as before in theory, confessing and yielding, and varying the plan of her coquettish allurements, although she is not to appear so much a coquette by profession as by nature, the prey of the first, as afterwards of the second opportunity, when the pander in consequence has so easy a part to play. She was 'won at the

first glance,' she tells Troilus, but confesses that it was 'hard to *seem* won.' She had held back, although she wished that 'women had men's privilege of speaking first.' She acknowledges that she loves him, 'but not so much but she might master it!' And yet this is a lie, for her

> thoughts were like unbridled children, grown
> Too headstrong for their mother!

Thus she trifles with him, and in every concession she plants a sting; she tempts him by an ambiguous expression to kiss her, and then declares she had not meant it. She plays the same game subsequently with Diomedes, promises, draws back, gives him Troilus' sleeve, takes it away again, and all this to sharpen him like a whetstone; Diomedes, understanding all these arts and jests, declines them, and by this manner also attains his end. With Troilus they are better adapted, although superfluous. She wins him merely by her suspicious anger as to his challenging her truth; the very sign of an evil conscience in her he takes for delicate sensitiveness. She enchants him when she assures him that in simplicity 'she'll war with him.' She swears also to be unceasingly true to him, but she does so with ominous and equivocal expressions: 'Time, force, and death,' she says,

> Do to this body what extremes you can;
> But the strong base and building of my love
> Is as the very centre of the earth,
> *Drawing all things to it!*

With the same suspicious expression Pandarus praises the innate constancy of all her kindred: 'They are burs, they'll stick where they are thrown;' that is, to one as well as to another.

This humorous treatment justifies what we have said; Shakespeare has taken hold of the love story of Troilus and Cressida from its comic side. But he has not, therefore, treated it for its own sake. He has connected it, as Thersites (Act v. sc. 4) remarks in the play itself, with a second action, with the proud withdrawal of Achilles and Ajax; and this second action so far surpasses the story of Troilus in importance, length, and force of handling, that the latter only appears like an episode in comparison. Everyone will perceive that the prologue, which names the scene of the Trojan War

as the piece, is far more descriptive of its purport than the epilogue spoken by Pandarus, which from its lesson upon pandering relates only to Troilus and Cressida, and which Steevens therefore considers to be only the idle addition of an actor. But even looking away from this second part of the play, we must perceive with regard to the story of Troilus itself that it is of little worth in itself. It is very remarkable, but every reader will confess that this piece creates throughout no real effect on the mind. No one on reading the play will readily feel any sympathy or love for any character, any preference for any part, any pity for any suffering, any joy at any success; not even in the affair between Troilus and Cressida, which speaks to the heart more than any other incident in the piece. The wanton portions will not charm, the elegiac will not move; the character of Troilus just as he is, were he placed in other society, would attract our interest in no slight degree; and we might almost lament that a character drawn in so masterly a manner is not designed with the intention of making it interesting in and for itself; but in such a connection this is not possible. His farewell to Cressida, sustained in the truest language of emotion, would touch us to the utmost if we could imagine it separated from the circumstances that belong to it; here, however, where throughout a concealed intention lurks in the background, we cannot venture to resign ourselves to psychical impressions. We feel throughout the play a wider bearing, a more remote object, and this alone prevents the immediate effect of the subject represented from appearing. The understanding is required to seek out this further aim of our comedy, and the sympathy of the heart is cooled. Here, as in Aristophanes, the action turns not upon the emotions of the soul, but upon the views of the understanding, and accordingly the personages acting occupy the mind as symbols rather than the heart. The comedy becomes a parody, we doubt if it is not even a satire, and it betrays an intention to rise above the earlier comic plays of the poet, in the same way as the later tragedies rose above the earlier. The editors of the first edition (in 1609) appeared desirous of indicating this higher value of the play. In a prefatory address to the reader, which is only to be found in some copies distributed before the representation of the play, great praise is bestowed upon all Shakespeare's comedies; but this *very* piece is distinguished above them all as superior in wit and intrinsic excellence. 'It

deserves such a labour,' it says, 'as well as the best comedy in Terence and Plautus; and believe this (it is prophetically added), that when the poet is gone and his comedies out of sale, you will scramble for them and set up a new English inquisition.'

The aim of this dramatic farce was a parody of 'the crown of all heroic tales,' the Trojan myth; upon this point everyone seems agreed. The question is, however, to what tradition this parodied representation relates, whether to Homer, or the travesties of the middle ages, which treated the story from the Trojan point of view? Shakespeare had undoubtedly before him all that had reached England concerning the latter; Lydgate's 'history, sege, and destruccyon of Troy,' 1513, a free rhythmical translation of the well-known Guido of Colonna, and besides this Caxton's translation of the 'recueil des histoires de Troyes,' by Raoul le Fevre, chaplain to Philip of Burgundy (1471 and later), which was widely spread and was very popular in England down to the eighteenth century. From these romanticised stories of Troy, Shakespeare took his designation of places, the names of the gates, the transference of the epithet Ilium to Priam's castle, &c. From thence he drew the characters of Margarelon and the sagittary or centaur (Act v. sc. 5); from thence the connection between Achilles and Polyxena, the relationship between Ajax and the Trojans, the description of Calchas as a deserter from the Trojans, which Chaucer has also; the circumstances of Hector's death are here related by Troilus, and only referred to Hector by Shakespeare. The travesty of the ancient heroic age into the chivalry of the middle ages lay in these sources, and Shakespeare transferred it to his comedy. From his adopting this mode of treatment, Coleridge was 'half inclined to believe that Shakespeare's main object was to translate the heroes of Paganism into the not less rude but more intellectually vigorous warriors of Christian chivalry, to substantiate the graceful outlines of Homer into the flesh and blood of the romantic drama, and to give a grand history piece in the robust style of Albert Dürer.' Schlegel, in sharing this view, deprecated our fear that Shakespeare had intended to commit a crime against the venerable Homer; inasmuch as it was not the 'Iliad' that he had in view, but only those popular chivalric romances of the Trojan War which proceeded from Dares Phrygius.

We may, however, reasonably doubt whether that which

Coleridge assumed to be the object of this play may not rather have been merely a *means* to that very object which Schlegel denies—of practising, not a crime, but a wanton satire against Homer. "Taking Schlegel's words literally, it is not to be denied that Shakespeare had Homer *before him*; that is, that he made use of him as well as of Caxton. It is remarkable that Shakespeare has in this play avoided confining himself closely to all his sources equally. In language or speeches there is hardly any distinct reference to Homer, or to the works on Troy, or even to Chaucer, ready as it lay to hand. The conference of the Trojan chiefs concerning the restoration of Helen alone reminds us in its main features of a similar 'Parliament' in Caxton, and the jests of Pandarus (Act IV. sc. 2) faintly resemble an analogous passage in Chaucer. Otherwise all the more important actions follow accurately no single source; the separate features of the story and of the characters are disconnected, and are borrowed indifferently, if not intentionally, sometimes from one, sometimes from another. If we can cite certain passages for which our comedy has to thank Chaucer and Caxton, we can adduce others also which could be only derived from Homer himself. Almost all the prominent incidents in the 'Iliad' are alluded to in some way, either hinted at, imitated, or detailed. At the very beginning there is the duel between Paris and Menelaus, the review of the heroes from the tower, Hector's farewell, the conference of the Grecian princes concerning the prolongation of the war, that of the Trojans about giving up Helen, the character of Thersites the reviler, the duel between Hector and Ajax, an allusion to the arrival of the new confederate Rhesus (Act II. sc. 3), to the pursuit of Æneas by Diomedes (Act IV. sc. 1), and even perhaps to that meeting of Diomedes with Glaucus, which is here transferred to Æneas. By far the greater number of these incidents are not in the Trojan books. The mention of the faction among the gods (Act III. sc. 3) in favour or disfavour of men can only be referred to Homer. What in our estimation entirely decides this question is that the action, passing over the early events of the war, begins in the middle; that the external purport of the play begins with the withdrawal of Achilles and ends with Hector's death, a limit at which Shakespeare could alone have arrived by reading the 'Iliad.' In his contemporary plays Shakespeare speaks in Antony of the sevenfold shield of Ajax; he makes Coriolanus

call his spear his ash; these are undoubtedly Homeric reminiscences. But far more than these exterior indications does the conception of the main characters prove Shakespeare's acquaintance with Homer. It would not be difficult to show that he has conceived the characters of Menelaus and Ajax very similarly to those in Chapman's version of Homer, whilst Ajax, for example, appears very different in the Trojan romances. The character of the reviler Thersites does not appear in Caxton; it was indeed known in England since 1537 by a rude burlesque interlude of that name, but he does not appear here as the caricature of the Homeric Thersites, such as Shakespeare represents him. It was the pride of Chapman that he wished to surpass the old translators of Homer in exact discrimination of the characters which were endowed by the poet with such different attributes; this attempt Shakespeare seemed to strive to carry still further, and indeed to surpass, by his skilful mode of individualising, by which he gave greater distinctness to the different classes of character in Homer, carrying this to the very limits, and sometimes even beyond the limits, which divided the characters from caricatures. In this task of thus stripping these personages of their ancient nobility, Shakespeare found himself obliged to display, as if by way of amends, a greater freshness of poetic splendour; and as his strength could not manifest itself here in the development of great characters and great mental concussions, it was obliged to show itself in that part of the poem which addresses itself to the understanding, by that sententious wisdom which, in fulness of imagery, depth of thought, and abundance of tested maxims of experience, is unequalled in any other of Shakespeare's works, and forms indeed a noble contrast to the burlesque action. If Shakespeare was willing, either in jest or earnest, to contrast his own play with the Trojan books of Caxton and Lydgate, he did them an honour beyond their deserts in this effort, in which the poet might have ventured to contend with Homer, whose Nestor and Ulysses he destroyed on one side and formed anew on the other, thus giving him, as it were, a poetical reparation which excused the license he had taken.

But was such a license really aimed at? Had Shakespeare (taking Schlegel's words, before alluded to, metaphorically), while he had Homer before his eyes as his source, had he him also *in his mind*, when he made a parody of his tragi-comedy? I think these are scarcely to be separated, although no crime,

not even an injurious license, was practised thereby. As to clothing and form, it could not have been Shakespeare's intention to travesty Homer; that had been done in the old books on Troy., To wish to oppose him from a party view of the matter would at least have been nothing new. Shakespeare had essentially to do *with the matter* of this great poetic theme, and this led him back first to the origin and foundation of the Trojan story; here was its weak side, that on which he could treat it humorously. For this end all elaborations of the story were, truly speaking, equal; but Shakespeare must have felt that he was most sharply opposed to Homer on account merely of the genuine nature of the source. He therefore surveyed all these different sources from one point of view; he took matter from them all, ever according to his intention; he took the travestied form, which suited his object best, out of the books of Troy; the episodical matter, which he wanted especially for his parody, from Chaucer; but in the main action, and in the limits in which he kept it, his drama adheres to the Homeric epos.

If we pass to the examination of the actions and personages of our comedy, we may be induced at the first glance to believe that Shakespeare gave to the reviler Thersites the part of the chorus, which expresses the actual meaning of the piece most distinctly. His abusive tongue destroys the object, indeed, by plunging in the deepest mire both the action and the actors. 'All the argument,' he says, 'is a cuckold and a whore.' In the course of things there is nothing but 'patchery, jugglery, and knavery!' 'A good quarrel, to draw emulous factions, and bleed to death upon! Now the dry *serpigo* on the subject! and war and lechery confound all!' This is, in a few words, the opinion of Thersites. All the actors are in his sight 'nothing but lechery, all incontinent varlets.' Even Achilles has become idle and inactive, because Queen Hecuba allures him with her daughter; the uncle Pandarus and the father Calchas make the same use of Cressida; thus, too, if we are to believe Thersites, Agamemnon is a lover of quails (loose women), and Patroclus is as fond of them as a parrot of almonds; so Troilus wrestles with the victorious Diomedes for a Cressida, and Paris with Menelaus for a Helen. In his contempt for this originator of the campaign, Thersites uses even stronger and more venomous words to express his contempt for the whole affair; he would not mind being the most con-

temptible of creatures, 'the louse of a lazar,' but 'to be Menelaus, he would conspire against destiny.' Next to him he hates Achilles and Ajax the most, because they possess that which most provokes his envy. His biting spirit makes him feel more nearly allied to the faction of the wits, and therefore he spares Nestor and Ulysses; but he de ply abhors those strong ones who quarrel about him, who make him their buffoon, and then reward him with blows for abusing his freedom. It gratifies him to mock this rude brutality; he calls them the 'draught-oxen' of the crafty Ulysses and Nestor; of so little wit that they could not 'deliver a fly from a spider, without drawing their massy irons and cutting the web;' if Hector were to knock out either of their brains, it were 'as good crack a fusty nut with no kernel.' Envy and jealousy fill him with the poison and obscenity with which he besmears everything; he calls upon 'the devil, envy,' to say Amen to the curses which he utters upon all. Anger makes him like the 'porcupine,' which turns its quill against everybody; envy, like the 'unsalted leaven,' which makes all the dough mouldy, which places him on the lowest scale among the envy-divided Greeks. But for this very reason *his* voice is not the decisive one, which could lead us to the poet's true meaning. We *can* only take this view of the action before Troy, when, placing ourselves on a level with Thersites, we give our vote for cowardice which mocks at bravery, for envy which depreciates greatness, for ugliness which robs everything of the splendour of beauty, for flat prose which ridicules every ideal motive, for downright badness which sees everything in its worst aspect. In him we hear the sarcastic spirit, which regards everything as utterly bad, and will neither see nor acknowledge the existence of what is good, noble, or beautiful. But on this bad principle, this principle of absolute meanness, Shakespeare has not designed his merry, humorous play.

The question concerning the origin and object of the Trojan struggle has been brought under discussion by our poet in higher circles and has been treated far more fundamentally and poetically than by Thersites. That this origin was a main point with him is shown by his placing in the foreground the relation of Troilus and Diomedes to the abandoned Cressida, as a corresponding one to the similar and previously well-known relation of Paris and Menelaus to Helen. A stolen wife was the cause of the earliest national war between two quarters of

the world. Two owners strive for her, as Diomedes says to Paris, both alike foolishly; the one seeks her,

> Not making any scruple of her soilure,
> With such a hell of pain and world of charge;

the other defends her,

> Nor palating the taste of her dishonour,
> With such a costly loss of wealth and friends.

The noble Hector feels the ignominy of the matter, when in such eloquent words he defends the right of marriage, and Ulysses, also, when his gall overflows on the subject of the disgrace, for which 'they lose their heads to gild the horns' of Menelaus. But, at the same time, the action has in the eyes of Hector as well as of Ulysses another, a better, and a poetic side, in reference to which the poet clothes his verse with dignity and seriousness. In the assembly of the Trojans (Act II. sc. 2) Helenus and Hector discuss the restoration of Helen. The latter, confessing his fear of evil consequences, calls 'modest doubt the beacon of the wise,' and surety 'the wound of peace;' the former reminds him to listen to the grounds of reason. The wanton and interested alone, Paris and Troilus, will not hear of reason. Hector suggests that the cause of the war, Helen, is not worth contending about. Troilus rejoins, 'What is aught, but as 'tis valued?' Hector more justly replies:—

> 'Value dwells not in particular will;
> It holds his estimate and dignity
> As well wherein 'tis precious of itself
> As in the prizer; 'tis mad idolatry,
> To make the service greater than the god.

Troilus, however, reminds him of the beauty of Helen, of the value the Greeks set upon her, of the Trojans' own declaration, that she was 'inestimable,' and of the national honour which was mixed up with the affair. And Hector, although the prophetess Cassandra has justified his fear of the result, although he has himself declared the chief reason for Helen's restoration to be the holy right of marriage, although he has truly said that to persist in doing wrong makes it much more heavy, although he sees that the youthful and superficial defenders of the war are only influenced by lust or revenge, yet, at the reproof of Troilus, he himself gives up the cause of reason; he acknowledges that the general honour and dignity of Troy are at

stake, that Helen's is a cause that spurs them on to great and valiant deeds. Thus Shakespeare recognises the chivalric object of the strife, the romantic and poetic side of the action before Troy among the Trojan party, but no moral principle and right. Consequently the violent Troilus, who is here prominently placed as a counterpart to Paris, meets his tragi-comic end, and Hector falls a victim to his ambition for glory. This thread runs through the whole character of Hector. We see at the beginning the otherwise patient and tranquil man full of ambitious wrath, because his glory has undergone a slight fall by means of Ajax. On this account he is armed before sunrise, he strikes his servants, he scolds Andromache; at the end of the piece we find him again just the same. To make amends for that blot on his fame he sends his challenge to the Greeks. He pays at length no further attention to the prophecies of Cassandra, to the entreaties of his wife and his father; with death before his eyes he esteems his honour above his life.

The wiser Grecian princes regard the matter from a similar point of view as the Trojans. Ulysses even judges the object of the war more severely than Hector. Nevertheless, he exhorts to continue the long and unfavourable struggle on the same ground of glory. The noblest undertakings, he declares, do not equal the projects formed; the gods protract the end, to 'find persistive constancy in men;' this constancy is shown best in misfortune, when

> Distinction, with a broad and powerful fan,
> Puffing at all, winnows the light away.

On the smooth sea the shallow boat sails beside 'the strong-ribbed bark,' but it perishes in the storm, whilst the other, uninjured, cuts its way through the 'liquid mountains.' Herein, however, appears the poet's preference for Troy, that he makes the counsellors within the city unanimous at a similar exhortation to warlike deeds, whereas the Greeks are divided into parties, in which ambition, descending to petty envy, is warped from its chief aim. Viewed in a moral and just sense, the cause of the Greeks is not better than that of the Trojans; on the side of honour it is worse. Shakespeare has allowed the Homeric Achilles, who purchased lasting fame with a short life, to degenerate from a hero into a vain, morbidly proud, and effeminate mocker. Not on account of any dispute with

Agamemnon, but for the sake of the promised Polyxena, he withdraws from the fight and from glory; he has no sympathy with the common honour, like Hector; he abandons the glory and honour of Greece to follow this love; he cares for nothing in the world but what affects him personally; he rouses himself, therefore, first after the death of Patroclus (this trait also Shakespeare takes from Homer), and even then only for a victory which brings him more ignominy than honour. The weak Ajax imitates him in haughtiness and inactivity, and withdraws, as Achilles had done, in the decisive moment, after having won a little honour. Ulysses takes all possible pains to arouse in both the public spirit, the ambition, and the thirst for glory which overflowed in Hector and Troilus. The finest speeches in the play, as well as the intrigues which lengthen out the action, have reference to this intention. To this we may trace that eloquent speech on the destroyed discipline and deference to rank (Act I. sc. 3), and on the fever of envy which caused those divisions and weakness in the camp, wherein lay the strength of Troy. There is reference to it in the proposal to appoint Ajax for the single combat with Hector, and thereby to rouse Achilles. There is reference to it in the oft recurring eulogy of the ascendency of mental over bodily strength. There is reference to it in the shameless flattery with which they bait the stupid Ajax and feed his hungry, envious ambition. There is reference to it in the noble lesson (Act III. sc. 3) impressed upon Achilles, and which was the purport of Ulysses' first speech, that steadfastness alone keeps honour bright. All this has little effect; the two strong armed heroes have too little feeling for honour and glory. Hector and Troilus have too much; these latter mean well and do ill, the former mean ill and do well, or rather they escape harm. On the side of the Greeks, Hector and Ulysses fare the best, because they possess at least public spirit and policy. Yet this also is only ordinary cunning which displays profound wisdom in the mysteries of state policy when the question concerns mere espionage, a wisdom which in consequence attains its ends only in an equivocal manner.

By this absence of a moral cause in both Greeks and Trojans, by this want of public-spirited honour, especially among the Greeks universally, Shakespeare has cast a deep gloom over the whole action and story, and this gloom is rendered only the more striking and apparent by the gleams of noble principles

and wise reflections that fall upon it. Even in the description of the characters and in the bearing of the style throughout the intention has been to disfigure. In this play, according to Tyrwhitt, there are more bombastic expressions than in six others; the revilings of Thersites are so richly adorned with the eloquence of abuse and rudeness, the bloodthirsty impatience of Ajax before the duel is so full of exaggerated bombast, that this alone would betray the intention to degrade the whole subject by a caricatured representation. The challenge of Hector, delivered by Æneas in the style of Amadis, is so extravagant that Agamemnon himself doubts whether it be in earnest or mockery. As to the characters, even those least defaced, as Hector and Agamemnon, are not free from a ludicrous air. All these grand personages throughout are deprived of the serious aspect and the solemn bearing which distinguish them in Homer; they do not always exchange the buskin for the sock, but they repeatedly alternate them; they wear their every-day dress instead of that of festal pomp. The comic distortion of these characters is almost wholly attained by the one means, that they are more individualised than in the ancient epos; this alone would have destroyed the grandeur of the Homeric poem and its personages; it is the introduction of the particular where we expected or were accustomed to the general, and this is universally known to produce a comic effect. Shakespeare has only to show us Patroclus imitating old Nestor, coughing and spitting, shaking in and out the rivets of his gorget with a 'palsy-fumbling,' in order to render despicable and ridiculous the venerable picture of the 'faint defects of age,' which even Homer does not conceal. The poet himself has correctly described his own mode of procedure in that of those mockers, Patroclus and Achilles; sometimes they act Agamemnon's greatness in an exaggerated manner, sometimes Nestor's infirmities so strikingly, 'as like as Vulcan and his wife;' all the 'abilities, gifts, natures, shapes, achievements, and plots' of the princes serve 'as stuff for these two to make paradoxes.' And in this similar treatment our comic poet keeps so strictly within the line of truth, that even there, where he caricatures most, the striking resemblance to the Homeric characters is not to be denied, and the carrying out of these distinctive features corresponds closely to the outlines given by the ancient poet. We do not go so far as Godwin, who calls the Homeric Thersites a mere schoolboy's sketch compared to

Shakespeare's; but it is true that it is the image of Thersites in a concave mirror. The heroic stratagems of Ulysses are changed into very petty artifices, and his instinctive into conscious wisdom; but yet his character is hardly so much lowered as the sycophant son of Sisyphus in the tragedy of Euripides. We will not throughout maintain with Drake that the Homeric characters are here 'laid naked to the very heart, and so keenly individualised that we become more intimately acquainted with them than from Homer himself;' but it is true that in single instances we stumble, as it were, upon a psychological commentary. The hand is masterly with which, in the delineation of Ajax, physical strength is exhibited strengthened at the expense of mental power; the abundance of similes and images with which the rare but simple nature is described is inexhaustible; the discernment is wonderful with which all animal qualities are gathered together to form this man, at once both more and less than human; Mars' idiot, a purblind Argus, and a gouty Briareus.

If it be doubted whether, in this polemic comedy, more has been accomplished than to give vent to a Virgilian sympathy, or to a humorous freedom with regard to Homer and the other Trojan legends, or whether there may be a deeper meaning in this negation of the Homeric point of view, in this removal of all grandeur from the myth, we can at least gather from the whole performance this proximate truth, that the noblest poetry without a strong moral principle is not what it is capable of being and what it ought to be. The collected works of Shakespeare, as we have now learned to know them, show us that in his æsthetic system such a proposition would have ranked in the first place. And when we remember that even in the Grecian times Plato himself, from his philosophical and religious point of view, found matter for censure morally with regard to Homer, we shall not wonder if Shakespeare, from his poetic starting point, arrived at similar though different objections to the Trojan traditions. The points of view from which Aristophanes, with such reverential awe, considered the old poet, and that too on account of his moral and practical importance, lay too remote from Shakespeare for us to demand them from him. As the Trojan history lay before him, formed out of so many component parts, it seemed to him to be wanting in the higher moral, and thus at the same time in the connecting link with which he ever sought to unite his poetry

directly with life. And this he showed in an exaggerated manner in his comic play, where he so parodied the same action that, joining throughout the commonest traditions, he heaped together all their darker parts, and deprived the actors of every honourable and virtuous motive. By this means he naturally makes his own drama still more deficient in that connecting moral element. Certainly he would not have wished to reckon this play among those which hold up a mirror to the age, since it is not even calculated to produce the simplest psychical effect. The piece, therefore, by its half-satirical character, loses the common aim of the drama, if this were indeed at all intended; it is, however, not impossible that the comedy was never originally designed with this aim, was not indeed intended for representation. In this case this would be no reproach to the piece, so long as the new and unusual aim of the satirical or humorous drama were more certainly and acutely reached. But we doubt if anyone will allow this to be the case. If a humorous and ironical parody of the Trojan war—that is, of the facts in themselves—were aimed at, we must acknowledge that Cervantes grasped his object more successfully when he directed his humorous romance against knight-errantry, a decaying institution, which yet, out of all time and place, continued in the advancing age; whereas Shakespeare brought forward a long-forgotten state of things, which at that time did not even survive in the minds of the learned. But if the object aimed at were rather to satirise the poetic representations of this war, the defects of the play will become evident by another comparison. Aristophanes raised in this way his comedy into a satire; but then he renounced from the beginning the beaten path of the drama; he avoided all subjects which could give grounds for conjecturing an imitation of the usual circumstances of life; he elevated his actions into bold allegories, and never left the spectator divided between the course of one action which excited the feelings and another parallel action which challenged the intellectual and reflective powers. It is this division which injures the Shakespearian piece, in which we are not, it is true, attracted by the subject represented (the loves of Troilus and Cressida) for its own sake; but still we are not free, on the other side, to acquire a clear conception of the satirical intention. In a similar manner (as may have been aimed at here also) Aristophanes represented also literary

personages and events from the same moral point of view; but he has not taken them out of remote ages, he has directed his sallies against the living, against poets as well as statesmen; and this should ever be the object of satire, because we war not against the defenceless and the dead. But it may have been that the revived Homer at that day was considered a living author, and we will suppose that this very revival may have tempted Shakespeare to expose the weakness of the ancient, far-famed poetry. But even then the ground was not fairly won, and the scene of action was not clear and smooth. While he mixed together all the old sources of Trojan story, he threw down his glove before the most different combatants, before all who stood in the most different relation to the one cause which was the object of his attack. If it were, as Schlegel was of opinion, the chivalric books on Troy which he attacked, these were objects too insignificant, and even then too obsolete for Shakespeare's assaults; if it were Homer, then these assaults themselves would necessarily appear to us, in the present day, obsolete. A fiction so unconscious and innocent as the Homeric is must ever remain, like everything childlike, unfit for satire; the morals and opinions of such an age can be judged by no other pre-suppositions and conditions than those of the age itself, and Shakespeare had not the means nor the knowledge required for this. Shakespeare has founded his own poems in part upon a basis which, morally considered, was here and there still worse than the actual basis of the Trojan story (which even Homer has nowhere placed in a brilliant light); and in simplifying, in separating, and ennobling his materials, he has not on the whole done otherwise than is there done; we might, therefore, indeed doubt whether, reviewed even from his own position, his attacks, if they refer to Homer and Homer alone, are just and right. It is, however, doubtful if any serious attack were intended; that is, we hesitate whether a humorous or satirical design lay at the bottom of the play, whether he may have written in jest or mockery, whether in jest or mockery of the facts or of their poetic forms, or whether all or which of these forms was the point aimed at. This uncertain character of the drama and the doubtful connection of the poet with doubtful sources are the causes of our quitting this play with greater dissatisfaction than any other of Shakespeare's. The warmest admirers of Shakespeare are undecided about it, and even Coleridge declared that he scarcely knew what to say of it.

JULIUS CÆSAR.

If our poet's pure susceptibility for the comprehension of the Homeric works was disturbed by youthful impressions and school prejudices, and rendered impossible by imperfect knowledge and inadequate translations, his acquaintance with the Roman people and their political life and his free use of Plutarch in the three Roman histories are on the other hand all the more remarkable. In these the national spirit so congenial with the Roman history and the clear historic mind of the poet met each other half-way; and Shakespeare wrote these plays, in which his contemporaries saw the Romans 'with the half-sword' truthfully represented in costume and spirit, with the same delight as in the last century we admired the colouring of the age in Goethe's 'Götz.' Even in our own day we must acknowledge the truth of the poet's conception, which is even not disturbed by the oft-repeated objection that Shakespeare has made English citizens and artisans of the Roman populace; for the masses when set in motion are everywhere alike, especially in two nations politically so similarly constituted, so that this blame is rather to be considered as praise. We cannot indeed in quite a literal sense coincide with those admirers who, on the other side, have said that in these plays the character, the fate, the patriotism, the renown, the real disposition, and the public life of the eternal city are revived before us; but it is nevertheless true that the exact delineation and lively elaboration of the little that Shakespeare has been able to glean from Plutarch, characteristic of Roman life, are worth more than the closest description of the time derived from the severest antiquarian study.

Let us remember with what freedom and individuality Shakespeare has made use of his several authorities. When he had an older drama before him, he discarded for the most part the whole form, and retained only the story and the name.

Was it a poor novel of Italian origin, he could seldom use the web of the action without first unweaving it, nor a character without creating it entirely afresh. We need only recollect the shallow narratives out of which he fashioned All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Cymbeline, and the Merchant of Venice, to perceive with what a bold and regardless manner he treated the motives of the actions and the actions themselves. Nay, even in the chronicles of his English histories, however conscientiously he observed the historical tradition, he was obliged, in order to put life into them, to lengthen them considerably, and to introduce into them fictitious matter, and not unfrequently even to invent the explanatory motives of t
actions. An entirely different and startling relation e
between our poet and his Plutarch, whom he had r
Thomas North's translation (1579). The simple, pl
yet not unimaginative apprehension and represe
human affairs in this historian addressed itself
both to his head and heart, that he here set bo
freedom, wholly renounced his arbitrary power,
followed the historical text. We doubt whether
Shakespeare greater when he invented everything
its sources, or here where he took all as he found
we shall most admire in the one case his free power
or in the other his submission and self-denial. F
pride of authorship and all pursuit after originality,
here by the side of a classic biographer, never atte
strive with Nature, but rather reverentially to
uninjured in the genuine form which he
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over his sons—the silencing of the two tribunes, and the crown offered at the Lupercalean feast, until Cæsar's murder, and from thence to the battle of Philippi and the closing words of Antony, which are in part exactly as they were delivered, all in this play is essentially Plutarch. The omens of Cæsar's death, the warnings of the augur and of Artemidorus, the absence of the heart in the animal sacrificed, Calphurnia's dream, the peculiar traits of Cæsar's character, his superstition regarding the touch of barren women in the course, and his remarks about thin people like Cassius; all the circumstances about the conspiracy where no oath was taken, the character of Ligarius, the withrawal of Cicero, the whole relation of Portia to Brutus, her otation, her words, his reply, her subsequent anxiety and the circumstances of Cæsar's death, the very arts and f Decius Brutus to induce him to leave home, all the particulars of his murder, the behaviour of Antony lt, the murder of the poet Cinna; further on, the between the republican friends respecting Lucius e refusal of the money, the dissension of the two he decisive battle, their conversation about suicide, e of Brutus' evil genius, the mistakes in the battle, sue, its repetition, the suicide of both friends and ath by the same sword with which he killed Cæsar—from Plutarch's narrative, from which the poet had it whatever destroyed the unity of the action. The sation of Brutus and Cassius is in general true to description of them; the political moral of this whole imply conceived and expressed, and is after- y and Cleopatra.

neare to his source justifies us in e historical text. It is at the undiscernible ne of are s nks and the pact unity; but , attempt to take any other ge even a dramatic sketch

from it, and he will become fully aware of the difficulty of this apparently most easy task. He will become aware what it is to concentrate his mind strictly upon one theme (as is here the case), to refer persons and actions to one idea, to seek this idea out of the most general truths laid down in history, to employ, moreover, for the dramatic representation of this idea, none but the actual historical personages, and so at length to arrange this for the stage with practised skill or innate ability, that with an apparently artless transcript of history such an ingenious independent theatrical effect can be obtained as that which this play has at no time failed to produce. Indeed, Leonard Digges informs us with what applause Julius Cæsar was acted in Shakespeare's time, whilst the tedious 'Catiline' and 'Sejanus,' which Ben Jonson had worked at with such diligence and labour, were coldly received. Immediately on its appearance the play roused the emulation of all the theatres; the renowned poets Munday, Drayton, Webster, and Middleton wrote a rival piece, 'Cæsar's Fall,' in 1602, Lord Stirling a 'Julius Cæsar' in 1604, and a 'Cæsar and Pompey' appeared in 1607. At the period of the Restoration, Cæsar was one of the few works of Shakespeare that were sought out, represented, and criticised. In our own day, in Germany, we have seen it performed, seldom well, but always with applause. Separate scenes, like that between Casca and Cassius during the storm, produce an effect which can scarcely be imagined from merely reading them; the speech of Antony, heightened by the effect of external arrangement and the artifices of conversation, by proper pauses and interruptions, even with inferior acting, carries away the spectator as well as the populace represented; the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius is a trial piece for great actors, which, according to Leonard Digges, created even in his time the most rapturous applause; and even the last act, which has been often objected to, is capable of exciting the liveliest emotion when well managed and acted with spirit.

The question as to the time of the origin of Julius Cæsar has only lately been correctly answered. In a poem by Drayton, 'Mortimeriados' (1596), which in 1603 appeared in a new form under the title of 'The Barons' War,' there is a stanza in the third book of this edition which is very like the concluding words of Antony, and is not to be found in the first edition of the poem. The whole impression is, it must be admitted, that Drayton and not Shakespeare is to be considered the plagiarist,

and this because the passage is so entirely identical with the feeling of the piece that *it* could not have been borrowed by Shakespeare from another. Hence it appears that the play was composed before 1603, about the same time as Hamlet. Not alone is this confirmed by the frequent external references to Cæsar which we find in Hamlet, but still more by the inner relations of the two plays. These are so remarkable that, if preponderating reasons had not determined us not to separate the three Roman plays, we must have discussed Cæsar, for the sake of its internal relationship, close by the side of Hamlet and Macbeth, because it was conceived and written in the same train of thought as these two pieces. If we enter at once upon the connection of these two works with each other, we shall reach the object of our considerations upon Cæsar in the shortest way.

In Hamlet the impassioned wavering hero looked with envy on the Roman character of Horatio, who, while he suffered everything, seemed to suffer nothing, who was the slave of no passion, taking with equal thanks the buffets and rewards of fortune, his 'blood and judgment well co-mingled.' If we transport this character from Christian times into heathen ages, and from Denmark into the excited public life of Rome, we have the main features of Brutus, who forms the chief character in Julius Cæsar. Of a phlegmatic temperament, calm and serious, indifferent to amusement and pleasure, unmoved by passion, 'a lamb that carries anger as the flint bears fire,' Brutus is born to be a stoic, and practises the principles of that school which prescribes the passive use of life and enjoins the power of endurance. Of him, as of Horatio, it is said that none knew better how to endure than he, and Messala and Cassius acknowledge this with admiration. He possesses all the virtues which constitute a noble nature; he has strengthened in himself all the virtues which practical life ripens and brings to perfection; he has won for his own all the virtues which arise out of strength of will and the dominion of the mind over the passions. In his relations to his wife and servant he is tender and mild, amiable and full of kindly consideration; in all his relations to society and to the state he is unselfish, armed with probity, incapable of flattery, unbiassed by party spirit, perfectly upright and careful for the common weal; in his relation to himself, in his condemnation of passion, he is discreet and circumspect, never rash in action or decision, but his resolution

once taken he is invincible in spirit and action, firm and steady in carrying out his plans, and a stern ruler over inward emotions. Standing between the unmanly irresolute Hamlet and the manly overstrained Macbeth, the elements are

> So mixed in him, that nature might stand up,
> And say to all the world, *This was a man!*

That man, whose nature Macbeth also originally possessed, *that* man, who does nothing more and nothing less than what becomes a man, and who proves his manhood above all by mastery over himself. Shakespeare has developed this distinctive feature in Brutus by great examples. He has endowed him with a nature as profound and with feelings as powerful and as excitable as Hamlet and Macbeth; but the poet has concealed the uncommon intensity of these emotions under the veil of heroic calmness, and behind the accepted character of the determined politician. We scarcely perceive the uneasiness which disturbs him within, in those passages where, at the beginning of the conspiracy and towards the conclusion of it, he envies the careless sleep of his boy Lucius. Little adapted for dissimulation, he tells the conspirators to perform their parts steadily like clever actors, and he sets them a good example. When they think their plans are betrayed by Popilius Lena, Cassius is about to kill himself; but Brutus calmly looks the suspected person in the face, and observes that he is not dangerous. He conceals the project from his wife until he has heroic proof of her discretion. The early death of this beloved wife overwhelms him with 'grief and blood ill-tempered,' and makes him more ready to quarrel with Cassius than is his nature, but immediately afterwards he is able to conceal Portia's death from Messala, that the tidings may not shake his courage. Over the body of Cassius nature demands her rights, but he puts off the debt of tears until another time, that his personal anguish may not endanger the public cause. All these striking features of a sharply-drawn character are without display and are almost silently indicated in the piece; no more laconic characterisation has Shakespeare ever made use of than in this laconic Roman, who performs the greatest deeds with the utmost simplicity, and uses the fewest words over the grandest actions.

The play under consideration is a most striking variation on the theme of Hamlet and Macbeth, and gives us a new and

remarkable proof of the depth and many-sidedness with which Shakespeare thought out and elaborated any problem he had once seized upon. A deed of as great, nay, greater weight than that demanded of Hamlet or planned by Macbeth is imposed on this pattern of a man—namely, the murder of a hero, who had increased the greatness of Rome as much as he had endangered her freedom. The deed required of him is of a nature doubtful in itself; it is not one decidedly right or decidedly wrong, like that to which Hamlet was called and to which Macbeth was tempted. The uncertainty, the doubt, the discord, lay in the other instances in the men themselves, here it lies in the thing itself, and is only from thence transferred to an even, clear, and right-judging mind. Hamlet was urged to a just revenge, he was called to punish a wrong committed, he ventured not to take the first and only step, he scarcely desired the end, and the means still less. Macbeth feels himself tempted to murder and treachery, to the performance of a wrong yet not committed, he shudders at both end and means, but as soon as he is resolved he takes with the first step all the ensuing ones, as soon as he is determined as to the end he adopts the means also, grasping even more than is necessary. Brutus is persuaded by his friends to take part in a murder and conspiracy, as he himself calls it: for the restoration of freedom his task is to prevent an injustice as yet only *apprehended* on Cæsar's part; he desires the end, but only the means most necessary for attaining it; he takes the first step, but not the second and third; whereas he should either not have taken the first, or he should also have taken the others. With him it is not a disturbance of nature in consequence of an unequal temperament, and thus, resulting from this, a sin of omission, as with Hamlet; it is not a disorderly, exaggerated discord, and after its removal a crime, as with Macbeth; but after the quiet manly consideration of an equivocal task, it is a deed unrepented but atoned for, which from the end in view and the means used was a fault, an error, and as such was revenged upon his own head.

If in Hamlet the aim of the poet was to treat the relation of the intellectual to the active nature in a thoroughly human sense, in the history of Julius Cæsar the tendency is rather political: to depict the collision of moral against political duties. The struggle between the humanity of a noble and gentle nature and the political principles of an energetic

character, between personal feelings and public duty, this is the soul of this play and the most interesting point of the situation in which Brutus is placed. Considered in himself, Brutus is of much too moral and too pure a nature to be fit for the hard and often dirty work of politics, like the gross degenerate Faulconbridge or the sharp Cassius. At the first hint, when Cassius initiates him into his ideas of a conspiracy, he feels that he is drawn into a foreign element. 'Into what dangers,' he asks,

> would you lead me, Cassius,
> That you would have me seek into myself
> For that which is not in me?

His own inward voice calls him not to this deed. It is true the necessities of the time weigh upon him and prepare for him heavy sorrows; the rising ambition of Cæsar has made him reflective, thoughtful, and sorrowful, but as ever he has kept the emotions of his soul concealed; to combat these sufferings, or the cause of them, the strong sufferer is not disposed. When he assures Cassius that he would not

> repute himself a son of Rome,
> Under these hard conditions as this time
> Is like to lay upon us,

he probably thinks only of voluntary banishment. But this man, in himself little created for politics, is yet placed under a constitution that allows no rest from politics, and he is brought up in principles which necessitate active life. He possesses, like Hamlet, a cultivated mind, and according to Plutarch, as well as Shakespeare, he carries books about with him even in the camp; he is a lean thinker, as Cæsar in Plutarch describes not only Cassius but Brutus also; but, according to his own testimony, which Shakespeare found in Plutarch, he could not endure the Ciceros, men whose cultivation advantaged nothing, whose finest principles were never living ones; and Shakespeare has represented him quite in this spirit. Next to his human duties, consonant with the ideas of all antiquity, stand his political duties, next to the virtue of the individual stands in equal rank the honour of the patriot. Consequently, immediately after those defensive words to Cassius, there follows the declaration:—

> What is it that you would impart to me?
> If it be aught toward the general good,

> Set honour in the one eye and death i' the other,
> And I will look on both indifferently:
> For, let the gods so speed me, as I love
> The name of honour more than I fear death.

To these his political principles Cassius now applies himself in order to draw him into a conspiracy against Cæsar. From this moment his anxiety as to the condition of the time and state rises to a great internal struggle. He eats, he sleeps, he speaks no more; imaginations and cares torment him day and night; as he says,

> Between the acting of a dreadful thing,
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:
> The genius and the mortal instruments
> Are then in council; and the state of man,
> Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
> The nature of an insurrection.

We have seen Macbeth shaken by a similar revolution, by similar phantasms and fearful dreams, and he drove them away as soon as possible; we have seen Hamlet disturbed and ruined by them; in Brutus none but the actor can show them to us, and he only very faintly; they are repressed by a strong mental power, which calmly weighs the principles of action in the disputed point, and decides with stern composure accordingly. When Brutus exclaims against the 'dangerous brow of conspiracy,' we see his whole nature opposed to it, but after he has once acknowledged it as necessary, he teaches the practice of its dangerous arts. He would gladly slay Cæsar's spirit and 'not dismember Cæsar,' but as his ruling ambition is contrary to the cause of freedom, his republican principles permit no hesitation. When pity for Cæsar is placed in the scale with pity for his country, there is not a doubt which has the preponderance. When the human relation between him and Cæsar is opposed to the relation towards his country in which he is placed by the republican spirit inherited from Junius Brutus, it is irremediable but that the restoration of public freedom must be his first duty. The purest motives decide the inward struggle in favour of patriotism; even his bitterest foes acknowledge this. Cæsar must fall as a sacrifice to his country, its weal, and its freedom; necessity not hatred, justice not personal feeling, arm those hands against him, which Brutus, after the deed, would chide if he could. No impure motive, such as Cicero's ambition, is to

be permitted. No unnecessary crime is to degrade the one unavoidable deed, the 'even virtue of their enterprise,' which Brutus is to accomplish as a sacrificer, a 'purger,' and not as a murderer. In the moment of its consummation, the coldly resolute man is so sure of his good reasons that he thinks even the son of Cæsar would be satisfied with them. In presence of the Roman populace, with the same security and calmness, he calls down upon himself his own fate: 'that, as he slew his best lover for the good of Rome, he has the same dagger for himself, when it shall please his country to need his death.'

Now in this inward struggle, and in the decision which Brutus arrived at, there lies a double error, which may be viewed both from a moral and a political side. Brutus appears in Shakespeare, and even in Plutarch, united in a closer friendship with Cæsar than history proves to have been the case. His brother-in-law Cassius says to him:—

> When thou didst hate him worse, thou lov'dst him better
> Than ever thou lov'dst Cassius.

His enemy Antony calls him 'Cæsar's angel.' The poet has in a wonderful manner put in the mouth of the falling Cæsar, at sight of Brutus, the Latin words, *Et tu, Brute?* to give greater emphasis to the painful surprise of his fatherly friend, who would never have expected to have seen Brutus among the number of his murderers. Was it really suitable to the personal relations of this feeling and noble man that he should imagine Cæsar's death to be the only means for restoring the freedom of the state? Do not the words of Antony fall upon him with fearful weight, that

> when the noble Cæsar saw him stab,
> Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms,
> Quite vanquished him: then burst his mighty heart?

Must he not have been struck dumb when the same Antony cast this reproach in his face, that while exclaiming 'Hail, Cæsar!' and flattering him to his face, they had maliciously killed him? The stain of assassination adheres to Brutus, a crime which no political duty, *no* opposite duty whatever, can outweigh. This stain cleaves closer to the 'lover' of Cæsar than to Cæsar's personal enemy Cassius, and to him, therefore, to Cæsar's good angel, the spirit of the murdered man subsequently appears as *his* evil and revenge-announcing genius. If,

from political grounds, the deed of Brutus is nobler, it is in a human respect more unnatural than that of Cassius, in whom it is represented as less noble but more natural. Shakespeare has not allowed considerations such as these to escape from the laconic Brutus, but they are contained emphatically in the things themselves, especially in the contrast of Antony. What is this voluptuary, this man of loose morals, this epicurean, this racer and gambler, of whom it is presumed that at the best he will 'take thought and die for Cæsar,' perhaps also laugh at his death if he escapes, what is *he* compared to Brutus? In spirit and capacity, indeed, he is much more than the unsuspecting Brutus imagines, but in a moral point of view he is only an abandoned and unprincipled man. So far as we see him act in this play, his flattery of the murderers to their faces places him on an equality with them in their flattery of Cæsar; we cannot blame the art with which he yields to circumstances, compassing his worst ends with the air of the utmost honour, stirring up the people by his eloquence in spite of the order that he should say nothing against the murderers; we cannot blame the cunning with which, pretending to be a plain, blunt man, he applauds the honourable republicans, whom he at the same time stamps as traitors, while he mockingly extols the superiority of the orator Brutus, having already annihilated his speech and his deed; we cannot, we say, blame this art and cunning any more than the hypocritical artifices of those who allured Cæsar into the net. But how low does this man sink when contrasted with Brutus' unselfishness, patriotism, mild forbearance, and saving of blood, we see the triumvir subsequently indifferent to the fate of his political enemies, altering to the prejudice of the people that will of Cæsar's with which he had roused them to revolt, using Lepidus as a beast of burden, and himself silently submitting to the young Octavius? And yet we must confess that even this wretch, on the score of humanity, recommends himself to us beside the corpse of Cæsar more than even the noble Brutus. Like Brutus he was the friend of Cæsar; to him also Cæsar had been just and faithful; his death touches him truly and sincerely; he testifies to this when he is alone, and when he is with the servant of Octavius; he ventures even to show his sorrow to the murderers; his heart is truly 'in the coffin there, with Cæsar,' and only to this real and undissembled sorrow the great effects of his artful speech are due. However great, from a political point of view, Brutus' patriotism and

upright intentions may appear in spite of his murderous act, equally estimable, in a moral sense, is the sincere fidelity of Antony towards his deceased friend, who can help him no further, in spite of his faithless projects against the conspirators, whom it is dangerous to oppose. The contrast which Shakespeare has instituted between Antony and Brutus is one of cutting acuteness, and there is even a double edge given to it, with regard to the political error of the action itself. When Brutus, after conquering his inward reluctance, decides for Cæsar's death, he tells us the *grounds* of this decision in a soliloquy (Act II. sc. 1) which in its whole tone bears a great resemblance with the chief monologue in Hamlet. To speak the truth, he knows not when Cæsar's 'affections swayed more than his reason.' He sees him standing only at the point which separates ambition from moderation, half striving, half forced to make that power, which circumstances have actually given him, lawful and hereditary. But because he sees the boldest ambition lurk behind Cæsar's hesitation, because he fears 'the abuse of greatness, when it disjoins remorse from power,' he would prevent these things. He must confess that 'the quarrel will bear no colour for the thing he *now* is,' he will, therefore, 'fashion it thus:—

> that what he is, *augmented*,
> Would run to these and these extremities;

and therefore as 'a serpent's egg,' he must be killed 'in the shell.' But this, indeed, for a man as upright and conscientious as Brutus, must be considered as looking too deeply into an uncommitted fault; in the great end to which he aspires he is impelled by an inherited ambition as refined and as popular as Cæsar's aspirations after dominion; and remorse is in him just as much disjoined from power as he fears may be the case with Cæsar.[1] No man is constituted a judge over thoughts. If it

[1] It is not uninteresting to see how Shakespeare's great contemporary Bacon agreed with him concerning similar conflicting duties. In his Essay *de augmentis scientiarum*, he introduces the feast at which, in the absence of Brutus and Cassius, the question concerning the policy of the killing of a tyrant is discussed. Some of the guests declared for it because 'Servitude was the extreme of evils'; others on the contrary, because 'Tyranny was better than a civil war'; others declared that it was unworthy of the wise to rush into danger like fools. Amongst such disputed questions, he continues, this is the most frequent: whether for the good of one's country, or 'for a great deal of good to ensue,' it is allowable to depart from justice.

is lawful to condemn on suspicion and presumption, then the people too were right in tearing the poet Cinna to pieces on a presumption. Had Brutus waited for these 'extremities,' it is possible that fate might have touched Cæsar, that an involuntary revolution and not a planned conspiracy, not the conspiracy of a friend, might have overthrown him. Brutus might have been mistaken in Cæsar. This is indeed a mere possibility not to be proved; but that he erred in Antony is certain, and this certainty makes the possibility of the other error the more probable. He considers Antony as a harmless voluptuary, as 'Cæsar's arm,' which could do nothing 'when Cæsar's head were off;' he *knows* that they shall 'have him well to friend.' In all these opinions about Antony he is entirely deceived, although he had been thoroughly warned by Cassius; and yet he decreed Cæsar's death upon a suspicion. He solemnly promised Rome that, if the restoration of the republic were to follow, she should have her wish from Brutus' own hand. Uncertain whether this good would follow the restoration, he commits a certain crime; a necessary part of this crime—the removal of Antony—he leaves undone; and the consequence is that through this very Antony the intended restoration is frustrated. In silence, before the battle of Philippi, he must hear from Antony the moral reproach of assassination; he must hear from Cassius the blame of having unseasonably spared the man whose tongue had otherwise not thus offended.

We have shown that the nature of Brutus in itself would never have impelled him to such a deed of violence; it was too gentle and magnanimous. But in these very qualities was that love of honour rooted, which led him to listen to the call of patriotism that urged him on; in them was rooted the tractability, the want of obstinacy and selfishness, which rendered him accessible to counsel and reminder from without; and finally that unsuspiciousness which induced him to leave those counsels untested. He yielded too quickly to the man who spoke from personal hatred to Cæsar; he accepted too trustingly the call of men who used him as a covering for their own moral nakedness; he read too credulously the papers they

This question Jason of Thessalia determined: 'We may do a little wrong that a great right may follow.' But the reply to this is good: 'Thou hast a guarantee for present right, but no warrant for the future. Men must pursue things which are just in present, and leave the future to the divine Providence.'

threw in his way as the voice of the Roman people. This call of his country stirred him as strongly as Lady Macbeth's taunt of manhood had stung Macbeth. The calm man, like that impassionate one, accepted his task; not that like Macbeth he plunged into it madly, but he made a wrong choice between the impulses of his nature within and the call of honour without. He sinks under this error without acknowledging it. As this could not be *expressed* in any reflection of the man who had once fallen into the error, the poet has made it evident by a parallel which indicates a wonderful depth of thought. In the episode concerning Portia, Shakespeare has closely copied Plutarch, almost without adding or omitting anything. And yet by the mere introduction of this there is a wonderful light cast on the matter, and its reflection reveals Brutus' concealed internal sensations after the deed. Portia is represented by the poet as the feminine, tender counterpart of Brutus. Altogether womanly in her care and watchfulness over her husband, as Cato's daughter and as Brutus' wife she feels a call to share the political plans of her consort, just as he, the descendant of the ancient Brutus, thinks he must not deny himself to the cause of freedom. By a self-inflicted wound she proves her vocation, her courage, her ability to be silent and to bear, and her proof succeeds. She now presses into the counsels of her husband, takes her share in his grief and in his secret, and becomes a passive conspirator. But no sooner is this accomplished than her suppressed womanhood comes to light, as the subjugated humanity in Brutus had done when he would not have Antony slain. She overrated her woman's strength when she forced herself into the conspiracy, as *he* in his sphere overrated his powers when he placed himself at the head of the conspirators. On the first failure of her expectations, Portia's heart breaks and she commits suicide. As quickly mastered by anxiety, Brutus flies from Rome with Cassius after Antony's success, both of them like 'madmen;' this separation drives Portia to despair, and her death re-acts upon Brutus' inward agitation, which in his usual manner he conceals to the last. The gloom which overwhelms him from this time forth re-acts again upon the evil issue of his cause; it betrays itself first of all in the severe manner with which he reprimands Cassius. The discord between the leaders cannot be hidden from the lookers-on and cannot have an encouraging effect; to spare his broken-hearted friend, Cassius too quickly abandons his opposi-

tion to the plan of battle, and the consequences are fatal. Powerfully as Brutus commands himself in the hour that decides their fate, different as he is to Macbeth in controlling his passions and his inward agitation, yet, like him, he is distracted, absent, peevish, and forgetful. His evil genius appears to him, not torturing and tormenting him as Richard's did, only paralysing his courage in the passing moment of its apparition, but returning again and announcing his last hour. Antony was right in supposing that both the republican leaders feigned courage but did not possess it. The mistakes which caused the loss of the battle, historical as they are, seem used by the poet to show the analogy between the crime and its punishment. Mistrust of good success had too quickly driven Cassius to self-destruction. 'Mistrust, melancholy's child, showed to the apt thoughts of men the things that are not; error, soon conceived, never comes to a happy birth, but kills the mother that engendered it.' These are words which may apply also to the mistrustful error which showed Brutus things in reference to Cæsar that were not. By joining the conspiracy the honourable man took a step for the sake of honour and patriotism which his moral principles would have forbidden; and with this his end fully corresponded. His philosophy taught him to bear the issue patiently, but when Cassius held before him the ignominy of being led in triumph by the conqueror, his feeling of honour led him to turn away from his moral principles at the instigation of this same Cassius, who first stimulated his feeling of honour against Cæsar; he resorts with passive courage to self-destruction, which he had once esteemed cowardly.

Shakespeare has scarcely created anything more splendid than the relation in which he has placed Cassius to Brutus. Closely as he has followed Plutarch, the poet has, by slight alterations, skilfully placed this character, even more than the historian has done, in the sharpest contrast to Brutus—the clever, politic revolutionist opposed to the man of noble soul and moral nature. Roman state policy and a mode of reasoning peculiar to antiquity are displayed in every feature of this contrast of Cassius to Brutus, as well as in the delineation of the character itself; the nature and spirit of antiquity operated with exquisite freshness and readiness upon the unburdened brain of the poet, unfettered by the schools. It has never been sufficiently considered what it was in those times

to enter with this free intelligence into the republican mind of the old world, to handle the political characters, life, and public spirit of a remote age, learned from Plutarch alone, with the same thorough knowledge with which Shakespeare had handled his popular English historical plays and the events of common private life. We grant that the richness of images in political matters does not stream forth as abundantly as in other things, and that this has had an effect on the very simple but noble and dignified bearing of this play, yet every single word shows on all material points a thorough understanding of the historical and political circumstances treated of, and it would be difficult to point out a single misapprehension with respect to the general truths which are to be drawn from the Roman history of that day. It has been said that Shakespeare, from studying Plutarch, entered even too deeply into the free political principles of the old world, and that he adopted liberal opinions and pure democratic ideas, not in harmony with those expressed in his earlier English historical plays. This is not the case. Into the one he has introduced the monarchical features of the history, as into the other the republican, preserving the spirit of each time and of each nationality; and in Julius Cæsar, even, he takes his stand between monarchy and republicanism as they struggled together at that time with nearly equal strength, and he has done this with the same admirable impartiality that everywhere distinguishes him. If it be thought singular that a poet under such absolute sovereigns as Elizabeth and James I., in whose immediate service he was, should attain to such political independence, to such freedom of ideas, to such warm sympathy with the falling Roman republic and its representatives, we must recollect that precisely at that time, in the closest proximity to England, among a people connected with that country by speech and origin, there arose after long struggling a young republic, supported by England against Spain, their common foe; that there republican ideas and statesmen had formed themselves by slow degrees, and that as a natural result these had produced in England the first minds who could comprehend free political institutions.

According to Plutarch public opinion thus distinguished between Brutus and Cassius:—that it was said that Brutus hated tyranny, Cassius tyrants; yet, adds the historian, the latter was inspired with a universal hatred of tyranny also.

Thus has Shakespeare represented him. His Cassius is imbued with a thorough love of freedom and equality; he groans under the prospect of a monarchical time more than the others; he does not bear this burden with thoughtful patience like Brutus, but his ingenious mind strives with natural opposition to throw it off; he seeks for men of the old time; the new, who are like timid sheep before the wolf, are an abhorrence to him. His principles of freedom are not crossed by moral maxims, which might lead him astray in his political attempts; altogether a pure political character, he esteems nothing so highly as his country and its freedom and honour. These principles, if they were not rooted in the temperament, spirit, and character of Cassius, would at all events have been more powerfully supported by them than the same principles would have been by Brutus' more humane, more feeling nature. Of a choleric disposition, no laugher, no lover of music, no gambler, no light chatterer over drink, he is never distracted from his purpose by any lesser matter, but is ever deep in the consideration of serious things; he is a lean thinker, a great observer, looking closely into men and their doings; and as such he is feared by Cæsar, and he proves himself such by the side of Brutus. He has nothing of the attractiveness of urbane natures like Cæsar and Brutus; sure and firm, no backbiter, not one who sells his love, he is a trusty friend, but his hypochondriacal humour and his morose irritability attract no one to seek his society. In this irritable and bitter state of mind he often contrasts himself with Brutus. He speaks of the 'rash humour which his mother gave him' as contrasted with his gentle friend; he confesses that he strives to obtain by art the equanimity which he does not possess by nature; he imputes the blame, which proceeds from Brutus' impartiality, to want of love, from which in his own case it would have proceeded, for he sees no ill in a friend and no good in an enemy. On hearing of Portia's death, after his quarrel with Brutus, he exclaims: 'How scap'd I killing, when I crossed you so?' for with *him* such irritation in the midst of so much sorrow would have taken away all self-command. He is oppressed by ill-humour and weariness of life, while Brutus is armed with patience. And whilst the latter at first considers self-murder as the refuge of the coward, Cassius sees in it just that which 'makes the weak most strong,' because at any time,

life, being weary of these worldly bars,
Never lacks power to dismiss itself.

Even on this old subject of dispute, Shakespeare testifies to his wonderful impartiality; he places in the lips of these contrasted characters these opposite notions respecting suicide, its origin, and its justification; not deciding in favour of either, because this different mode of thinking belongs to different men, and because no general law can be made concerning an act which the opinions and circumstances of the time may place in such a different light. In Hamlet and Cymbeline the poet respected the Christian view, and here with equal warmth he makes Cassius utter the opinion of antiquity (ἢ καλῶς ζῆν ἢ καλῶς τεθνηκέναι τὸν εὐγενῆ χρή. Soph. Ajax): 'he would as lief not be, as live to be in awe of such as he himself.' This love of equality, estimable and noble in its source, is mixed in Cassius with unworthy matter; but he is of a kind fitter for a conspirator, because he turns his over-strained principles into over-strained purposes. With his hatred of tyrants there is mixed the envy of Cæsar belonging to the more meanly endowed man; he remembers that he had once saved the life of the emperor in a swimming match, that he had seen him sick and subject to human infirmities, and now he is to bow before this man as before a god, he is to see him 'bestride the narrow world, like a Colossus,' while 'petty men walk under his huge legs' He seems inclined to measure rank by bodily strength rather than by power of mind; it amazes him that Cæsar should 'get the start of the majestic world,' which he would fain award to his own art of swimming; with the disparaging feeling of mediocrity towards real greatness he weighs only the similar meat upon which both feed, and compares their names, not their merits and endowments; and in this disparaging feeling lies the sharpest goad which generally urges on the most dangerous conspirators. For this reason Cæsar keenly watches his hungry look, and the disposition which is never 'at heart's ease,' when it 'beholds a greater' than itself. For this reason also Cassius is the natural originator of the conspiracy, and in all its plans and in all their councils he shows himself a greater master of the art than Brutus. Even in gaining over the members he betrays that knowledge of human nature which Cæsar praised in him. He lures the noble Brutus with the common weal and the call of family honour. The bitter Casca, who conceals his discontent under the garb of sarcasm, who, wholly dependent on

others, serves Cæsar almost with the zeal of Antony and hangs upon his words like oracles, and yet, led by Cassius, is ready to go as far as anyone in the cause of freedom, this Casca he lays hold of by his weak side on the night of the storm. In this night and its horrors he first feigns to see an image of Cæsar, who

> thunders, lightens, opens graves, and roars,
> As doth the lion in the Capitol.

When he perceives that Casca's superstition is touched, he refers it to the work they '*have in hand*,' which 'like the complexion of the element,' is most bloody, fiery, and terrible. He advises that Cicero should be drawn into their party, and in order to have one more name of repute among them, he is disinclined to share the hesitation of Brutus. Throughout with eagle eye he sees the right means for attaining his ends, and would seize them undeterred by scruples of morality; less irreproachable as a man than Brutus, he is as a statesman far more excellent. Full of circumspection, he is full of suspicion of his adversary; he is very far from that too great confidence in a good cause which is the ruin of Brutus. He possesses the necessary acuteness of judgment and action, available only in times of revolution; he knows that it is useless mixing in politics, far less in revolutions, unless one is prepared to exchange the tender morality of domestic life for a ruder kind; he would treat tyranny according to its own baseness; he would carry on matters according to the utmost requirements of his own cause, but not with the utmost forbearance towards the enemy; he would not use unnecessary harshness, but he would omit none that was necessary; he would think just as ill of the tyrant as the tyrant would of *his* adversary; he would, as far as in him lay, turn against him his cunning, his cruelty, and his power; he would go with the flood at the right time, and not, like Brutus, when it was too late. The difference, therefore, between his nature and the character of Brutus comes out on every occasion: Brutus appears throughout just as humanely noble as Cassius is politically superior; each lacks what is best in the other, and the possession of which would make each perfect. Antony, according to Cassius' opinion, ought to fall; even humanly considered Brutus practised towards him an act less ungrateful than to Cæsar; politically, his death was an actual necessity, which might have changed the whole issue of their

undertaking. Brutus tries to gain over Antony by presenting the nobler side of their act; Cassius, once he had agreed to spare him, attempts the same by means of dignities and honours. Brutus permits him to speak publicly in Cæsar's honour, which Plutarch also calls his second fault; Cassius addresses him with those bitter words of warning: 'You know not what you do.' Brutus has condemned Pella for taking bribes, and is in the right; Cassius took his part without exculpating him; 'it is not meet,' he says, 'in such a time, that every nice offence should bear his comment,' and he is no less in the right. Brutus condemns Cassius himself for 'selling offices to undeservers,'—*he* can and will 'raise no money by vile means;' a golden resolution, but one which will not raise the gold indispensable for the work in hand. Brutus loves not Cassius' faults, but at such times it is certainly best to shut our eyes to the faults of the friend whom we need. Brutus quits an advantageous post to advance to Philippi; the older soldier Cassius dissuades it, and only consents to it when influenced to trust all to the hazard of one battle. His judgment enables him to foresee the evil consequences; and when the flight of the eagles predicts the same results he becomes superstitious, and under the pressure of circumstances abandons his Epicurean principles, as Brutus by his self-destruction renounces those of the Stoa. In all these instances Cassius gives way to Brutus when he ought not, just as Brutus in the one first instance had given way to Cassius, when, according to *his* nature, he ought not to have done so. On this most delicate point Cassius, who usually yielded to no influence, is untrue to himself, as Brutus was in the one chief act; and just this one point, which is derogatory to Brutus on the score of humanity, raises Cassius in our estimation on this very score. The nobility of Brutus' nature so far prevails over this advocate for equality that he bows before the virtue and absence of all ambition in the other, and confesses his own inferiority, which he would never have owned before the imperious Cæsar; so that, in this unusually sharp contrast, the less noble character of Cassius is embellished at this point, just as the finer character of Brutus is debased by that deed; and Cassius, at the same time, on account of this delicate deference and respect for Brutus, becomes untrue to his political energy, and is obliged to act contrary to his own judgment. The union of two such dissimilar beings revenges itself on both; Brutus, by his political weakness, ruins the conspirators, who sought in

him a cloak for their moral weakness; they ruined him by seducing him to commit the first deed, contrary to his nature. They perish, mistaken in their ends or in their means, or in both. But that we may not infer from this that those who do not act, who hold back in circumstances of difficulty, are therefore the better, Shakespeare exhibits in the background the nearly silent figure of Cicero as a contrast. The excellence of his characterisation lies not in the fact that Shakespeare makes him speak Greek, but that he makes him speak Greek on such an entirely popular occasion, and so speak that those who understood smiled at each other and shook their heads like time-servers. 'He will never follow anything that other men begin,' says Brutus; yet he begins nothing himself. Nevertheless, with all his inactivity, he escapes ruin just as little as those active ones, but his death is inglorious. The deed of the others, on the contrary (thus Shakespeare praises it in his play, and his play through it), will 'in ages hence be acted over in states unborn and accents yet unknown,' and the 'knot of men' will be extolled, who gave their country liberty. And to this glorious remembrance this his play has certainly not a little contributed; and we believe not the less by the perfect impartiality with which it estimates the deed, by the strictly historical justice which the poet has observed respecting it, similar to that observed by Brutus in his speech concerning Cæsar, in which he 'extenuated not his glory, wherein he was worthy: nor his offences enforced, for which he suffered death.'

If Brutus erred more than Cassius in the means he employed in their undertaking, they both erred equally in the final aim of it. The restoration of the republic was no longer possible; the people had become unfit for freedom. Shakespeare has not subjected this historical view to any discussion unsuitable to a drama; but he found it in Plutarch, and with thorough understanding adopted it with artistic representation for his work of art. Fortune, chance, Providence, says Plutarch, was against the republicans: it appeared as if the realm could no longer be governed by a plurality, but necessarily demanded one monarch. The gods had, therefore, given the people Cæsar as a mild physician, who was best fitted to restore them; this showed itself when, immediately after his death, they lamented him and would never forgive his murderers, as Shakespeare expresses it: when it pleased them to need the death of Brutus. The poet has described this people exactly according to Plutarch's view of

them. First they shouted after Pompey, and when Cæsar came in triumph over Pompey's corpse they shouted after Cæsar. Brutus kills Cæsar, and they shout after him also. They want immediately to raise statues to him, they wish to crown 'Cæsar's better parts' in Brutus—'Let him be Cæsar!' So incapable were they of separating the idea of a conqueror from a ruler. As soon as Antony advances, they begin to consider 'whether a worse may not come in Cæsar's place;' that another *must* come in his place seems to be no longer a question. With such a people Brutus' noble thought of restoration was but a lovely dream, and Antony understood them better when he exclaimed over the body of Cæsar:—

> What a fall was there, my countrymen!
> Then I, and you, and all of us fell down.

Had the spirit of freedom still existed in the people it would have been possible, according to Brutus' suggestion, to kill 'Cæsar's spirit, and not dismember Cæsar;' as that was wanting, even his death could not restore freedom. Hence Cæsar's spirit is mighty after his death, and turns the swords of the republicans against themselves. What Shakespeare passed over in silence is that these republicans themselves were only the remains of Pompey's party, and had already served another ruler. What he did not forget to depict is that in Casca, Decius Brutus, and others, monarchical feelings themselves moved these conspirators, as they did Antony, to form a sort of court around Cæsar.

The character of Cæsar in our play has been much blamed. He is declared to be unlike the idea conceived of him from his 'Commentaries;' it is said that he does nothing, and only utters a few pompous, thrasonical, grandiloquent words; and it has been asked whether this be the Cæsar that 'did awe the world?' The poet, if he intended to make the attempt of the republicans his main theme, could not have ventured to create too great an interest in Cæsar; it was necessary to keep him in the background, and to present that view of him which gave a reason for the conspiracy. According even to Plutarch, whose biography of Cæsar is acknowledged to be very imperfect, Cæsar's character altered much for the worse shortly before his death, and Shakespeare has represented him according to this suggestion. With what reverence Shakespeare viewed his character as a whole, we learn from several passages of his works, and

even in this play from the way in which he allows his memory to be respected as soon as he is dead. In the descriptions of Cassius we look back upon the time when the great man was natural, simple, undissembling, popular, and on an equal footing with others. Now he is spoiled by victory, success, power, and by the republican courtiers who surround him. He stands close on the borders between usurpation and discretion; he is master in reality, and is on the point of assuming the name and the right; he desires heirs to the throne; he hesitates to accept the crown which he would gladly possess; he is ambitious and fears he may have betrayed this in his paroxysms of epilepsy; he exclaims against flatterers and cringers, and yet both please him. All around him treat him as a master, his wife, as a prince, the senate allow themselves to be called *his* senate; he assumes the appearance of a king even in his house, even with his wife he uses the language of a man who knows himself secure of power, and he maintains everywhere the proud strict bearing of a soldier, which is represented even in his statues. If one of the changes at which Plutarch hints lay in this pride and haughtiness, another lay in his superstition. In the suspicion and apprehension before the final step, he was seized, contrary to his usual nature and habit, with misgivings and superstitious fears, which affected likewise the hitherto free-minded Calphurnia. These conflicting feelings divide him, his forebodings excite him, his pride and his defiance of danger struggle against them, and restore his former confidence, which was natural to him and which causes his ruin, just as a like confidence, springing from another source, ruined Brutus. The actor must make his high-sounding language appear as the result of this discord of feeling. Sometimes they are only incidental words intended to characterise the hero in the shortest way. Generally they appear in the cases where Cæsar has to combat with his superstition, where he uses effort to take a higher stand in his words than at the moment he actually feels. He speaks so much of having no fear, that by this very thing he betrays his fear. Even in the places where his words sound most boastful, where he compares himself with the north star, there is more arrogance and ill-concealed pride at work than real boastfulness. It is intended there with a few words to show him at that point when his behaviour could most excite those free spirits against him. It was fully intended that he should take but a small part in the action; we must

not, therefore, say with Scottowe that he was merely brought on the stage to be killed. The poet has handled this historical piece like his English historical plays. He had in his eye the whole context of the Roman civil wars for this single drama, not as yet thinking of its continuation in Antony and Cleopatra. He casts a glance back upon the fall of Pompey, and makes it evident that Cæsar falls for the same reason as that for which he had made Pompey fall. In the triumph over him, men's minds rise up at first against Cæsar, the conspirators assemble in Pompey's porch, and Cæsar is slain in front of his statue. As his death arose out of the civil war, so civil war recommences at his death, and just as Antony predicts:—

> Cæsar's spirit, ranging for revenge,
> With Até by his side, come hot from hell,
> Shall in these confines, with a monarch's voice,
> Cry *Havock*, and let slip the dogs of war.

In this symbolic sense Cæsar, after his death, has a share in the action of the play, which does not bear his name without a reason. That curse of Antony's, too, falls back upon himself in Antony and Cleopatra, because he had destroyed those who had spared him, and offered him friendship, and even there the manes of Pompey interfere with continuous power, giving this history also the background of remoter histories, to which this drama is but an episode.

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA.

'A BOOKE called Antony and Cleopatra' was entered in the Stationers' Company, in London, in 1608, as destined for publication, by Edward Blount. As it was entered at the same time as the *book* Pericles, and as Shakespeare's play of that name was really printed in the following year, though by a different publisher, it is most likely that by the 'booke of Antony and Cleopatra' the piece before us was meant. Its origin, therefore, may be dated at 1607–8. Intimations in both of the matter treated of in the other, single peculiarities of style, and, perhaps still more, the poet's frame of mind at the time of its composition, place the piece close to Troilus and Cressida, which would confirm this date.

Shakespeare's close adherence to Plutarch's account of the life of Antony is the same in this play as in that of Julius Cæsar. The genius of the poet felt itself here also congenial with the history, because it was akin to nature; quite unlike his precursors, such as Samuel Daniel ('Cleopatra,' 1594) or his followers, or May and Dryden ('All for Love'), who handled the same materials, he did not transplant the personal relations of the chief characters out of history into the free realm of art, but here also he adhered closely to the historical world, and with a comprehensive glance surveyed the varied multiplicity of the historical events as a finished work of art. He passed over only such incidents as the Parthian war, which had but slight reference to the central point of Antony's history, but he retained entire every relation between him and the other Roman magnates. Antony's character, we can scarcely say, is actually different from the portrait drawn of him by Plutarch, but it is so altered by its position that the poet was at liberty to take it from his own point of view. Where there was an opportunity for psychical development, as in the reconciliation scene between Octavius and Antony, and in the description of Antony's despair

in the fourth act, Shakespeare enlarged the meagre historical notices with all poetic freedom and extension. For the most part, however, as in Julius Cæsar, he found his materials all ready, even to the details. Antony's last days, his twice repeated challenge to Octavius, his success in Alexandria and the passing over of the fleet; his suspicion of treachery in Cleopatra, her alleged death, Eros' self-destruction, Antony's death and last words, Enobarbus' defection, the desertion of Alexas and Dercetes, the embassies of Euphronius and Thyreus, the favour accorded to the latter by Cleopatra, her capture, Dolabella's emotion, the treacheries of Seleucus, the death of the queen and her attendants, all this is only history scenically represented.

Equal to Julius Cæsar in historical truth, this play is on the other hand not arranged with the same attention to dramatic clearness and unity as that is; other faults also seem to disturb somewhat the pure enjoyment of this drama. Coleridge indeed placed Antony in the highest class of Shakespeare's writings. He considered this play as a powerful rival to Lear and all the best dramas of our poet; he saw in it a gigantic power in its ripest prime, and contrasted it with Romeo and Juliet, because here the love of lust and passion is depicted, as there that of inclination and instinct. Among the historical plays of Shakespeare he declared it to be by far the most remarkable. This judgment, however, will not have found much support; we will try to place it in a more just and striking light. It is true this play is full and rich; we can scarcely name another like it in these respects. The diction is very forced, often short and obscure; the crowd of matter creates a crowd of ideas; important affairs are disposed of in a few sentences, great events recorded in a few words, historical names and references presumed to be known are left unexplained in the play itself. By this in single instances it has suffered considerably in clearness. On the whole the progress is not more entangled than in Julius Cæsar, but it is more detailed, and, therefore, more difficult to comprehend. A wanton multiplicity of incidents and personages pass before our eyes; political and warlike occurrences run parallel with the most intimate affairs of domestic life and of the affections; the interest is fettered to the passion of a single pair, and yet the scene of it is the wide world from Parthia to Cape Misenum. For the historical character this is indeed highly expressive

and striking, but it does no little damage to the dramatic clearness. Therefore it is that, perhaps, no play of Shakespeare's is so difficult to retain in the memory as this. With this one other cause is combined, or, at least, it co-operates with it, why this drama is seldom brought on the stage, and is little admired in representation. By the too numerous and discordant interruptions, that psychical continuity is destroyed which is necessary to the development of such a remarkable connection of the innermost affections as that between Antony and Cleopatra. Let the reader think over the purport of the various historical plays of our poet; he will nowhere find the external actual material of history impregnated with a sensible or sensual connection of so much importance. Let him look over the purely psychological dramas, and nowhere will he find a connection of the affections so incessantly crossed by external public affairs of such an opposite nature. This contrast is closely and profoundly connected with the plan and idea of the play. If Goethe understood the matter rightly when he said, 'Here everything declares with a thousand tongues that enjoyment and activity exclude one another,' we then perceive that the poet felt it incumbent on him to show the contradiction between the excited, busy, historical world, and the calm, sensual life of enjoyment. The way in which he understood, and, as it were, explained the given history, deserves the highest praise of Coleridge and all others; it is a master-work full of deep thought, from which every writer of history may learn to extract the spirit out of chronicles. But whether the theme, æsthetically considered, might not have been better carried out, whether large dramatic groups might not have been cut out of the complete history, which would have better satisfied the Aristotelian requirement of being easily surveyed as a whole, whether many of the inferior characters unnecessary to the aim of the play might not have been omitted, and all the acting personages thus concentrated upon the main point of the piece after Shakespeare's usual method—this remains a subject of doubt much easier for us to express than it could have been for the poet to remove. If, then, we are willing to subscribe to Coleridge's opinion concerning the apprehension of the historical matter and the description of character in the chief personages, we shall find it harder in an æsthetic view to rank this drama so high as he does. For there arises an ethical objection also, which will make most readers opponents to this piece and to

Coleridge's opinion of it. There is no great and noble character among the personages; no really elevating feature in the actions of this drama, either in its politics or its love affairs. This play seems to evince to us how much we should lose in Shakespeare if, with his ever great knowledge of men and nature, there did not go hand in hand on one side that æsthetic excellence (the ideal concentration of the actors and actions), and on the other side that ethical excellence (the ideal elevation of the representation of manhood). The poet had to represent a debased period in Antony and Cleopatra; he did this in obedience to historical truth; but this ought not to have prevented him from casting a glance at a better state of human nature, which might comfort and elevate us amid so much degradation. If we recall to mind the historical plays in which Shakespeare had to depict for the most part degenerate and ruined races, we shall recollect that in Richard II. there was not wanting a Gaunt and a Carlisle to make amends, and even in Richard III. the few strokes that described the sons of Edward are an agreeable compensation for the universal wickedness. Here, however, there is nothing of the kind, and we may even say the opportunity for such a counterbalance has been obviously neglected.'[3] It would surely have been easy, in the character of Octavia at least, to keep in view before us some higher human nature, which by a few traits only might have *exhibited* her to us in action, such as she now is merely spoken of in words.

We will introduce an observation here which will set this singular defect in Antony and Cleopatra in a still more remarkable light. It would appear as if Shakespeare, about the time between 1607–10, had had, we will not say a period, but intervals in which he wrote his poetry in a manner altogether more careless, whether we consider it from an æsthetic or from an ethical point of view. What might have been the cause of this we can scarcely guess. It is possible that his disgust to theatrical matters in general seized him more strongly about this period; it may also be possible that the traces of bodily exhaustion had already appeared in him, and that this may have been the cause of his withdrawal and the first intimation of his early death. Whether this be so, or whatever may have been the cause of the careless treatment of some of the works of this period, the thing itself seems incontestable.

We have seen how Shakespeare failed in Troilus, and that the play was not satisfactory either in dramatic treatment or as

a critical satire. We will now explain why all moral nobleness is wanting in Antony and Cleopatra, notwithstanding that the poet has placed the pair, who gave the name to the play, in the best light that was possible. In both pieces it is uncommonly difficult to separate irony from seriousness, appearance from reality. If we examine the characters of Cressida and Cleopatra, we shall fancy the poet wished to recur to the time of his earlier state of morals. Even in Coriolanus there is not a single character in which we can take pure pleasure. Timon also is, artistically considered, a negligent and unfinished work. The group would be increased by one play more (which would more than any other testify to the temporary indifference of the poet to his fame), if we were to admit that Shakespeare applied himself about this date for the first time to Pericles, which, at all events, was at this time brought by him upon the stage in a new form. The courtesan household here and in Timon, together with the similar matter in Troilus and in Antony, constitutes a strange whole, which, in a moral point of view, is quite analogous to the æsthetic carelessness in the treatment of all these plays. It is here that our Romanticists ought to have sought for facts when they spoke of a bitterness and acerbity in the character of our poet. But even then they ought to have limited this observation to a passing discord in his temper. For quickly must the man have recollected his own doctrine in Troilus, that 'perseverance alone keeps honour bright,' and that time would wrap even his works in the mantle of forgetfulness if he did not always keep pace with his better performances. He created, contemporaneously with these plays, his Posthumus and his Imogen, the most moral of all his creations, and soon after we see him in the Winter's Tale labouring with the same severe morality as in Othello, and in the Tempest with the same cheerful serenity of mind that delights us so much in his happiest pieces. It was but a few passing clouds that cast a fleeting shadow over the ever brilliant sky of his poetry.

As regards what is morally repulsive in Antony and Cleopatra, it is only fair to confess that if an error has been committed it is evidently in the choice of the subject; and that the poet, being unwilling to alter historical truth, has done all he could, nay, perhaps too much, to ennoble the matter, and to make it worthy of a place in the realm of poetry. It is so much the more necessary to give emphasis to this remark,

because, from the point of view from which we considered this group of plays, we might be led to do injustice to the poet. We might imagine he had put the characters of Antony and Cleopatra in a better light than he ought to have done, and clothed the voluptuaries with a certain lofty splendour, as if betraying a preference for them. But what he did in this respect was done undoubtedly for æsthetic purposes, and not from lightness of morality. If Shakespeare had taken Antony exactly as he found him in Plutarch, he would never have been able to give him a tragic character, he could never have excited an interest in him precisely in his relations with Cleopatra. A man who had grown up in the wild companionship of a Curio and a Clodius, who had gone through the high school of debauchery in Greece and Asia, who had shocked everybody in Rome under Cæsar's dictatorship by his vulgar conduct, who had made himself popular among the soldiers by drinking and encouraging their low amours, a man upon whom the hatred of the proscriptions under the rule of the triumvirate especially fell, who displayed a cannibal pleasure over Cicero's bloody head and hand, who afterwards renewed in the East the wanton life of his youth, and robbed in grand style to maintain the vilest brood of parasites and jugglers—such a man, depicted finally as the prey of an old and artful courtesan, could not possibly have been made an object of dramatic interest. It is wonderful how Shakespeare preserved the historical features of Antony's character so as on the one side not to make him unrecognisable, and yet how he contrived on the other hand to render him an attractive personage.

We are inclined to designate the ennobling transformation which the poet undertook by one word; he refined the rough features of Mark Antony into the character of an Alcibiades. He passes silently over the youth of his hero, he took from him his tendency to cruelty, covered the misdeeds of the triumvirate with a veil, showed only the best side of his rapacity and lavish prodigality, spoke loudly of his warlike past, his victory over Brutus and Cassius, his heroic endurance of hunger and want after his defeat at Modena, and strove especially to make his hero interesting on the score of brilliant natural gifts. It is not to be disputed that Shakespeare, by these touches, brought out the most attractive side of Antony. Even in the voluptuary and the profligate there is an alluring charm in the ready versatility, the natural superiority, the variety of talent, the

abundance of resources, and in the natural aptness to fill any part. Antony was indeed a man thus variously endowed. The most contradictory features characterise him in Plutarch as well as in Shakespeare. He is accustomed by turns to luxury and privation, to excess and want, to effeminacy and endurance, to epicurean extravagance and stoic forbearance; he is a soldier and a glutton; magnanimous over the corpse of Brutus, barbarous over that of Cicero; an image of rare unsteadiness and rare fidelity; generous towards Enobarbus, pettily revengful towards Thyreus; open and almost without any suspiciousness towards Cleopatra, a deep deceiver and spy towards Brutus; not free from great and petty ambition (with respect to Cæsar and to Ventidius), and yet a seller of honour out of vile lust; the most agreeable of buffoons and jesters, and at the same time able to bear a joke, and to hear the whole truth, even the harsh truth, from dependants; decayed by effeminacy, though personally brave; at one time, as at Mutina, rising in misfortune; at another, as at the end of his career, quickly sinking under it; sometimes like a Roman gladiator, at others an oriental despot; sometimes disposed to rank himself with the common soldiers, at others tickled with the fancy to play the Persian king, or the hero Hercules, or the god Bacchus; such a man, however much he may be an image of fickleness, is also an image of a genial disposition, in which natural abilities and capacity must make amends for a lower degree of freedom of will.

We defer, until further on, to show how the opinion upon Antony's character in Shakespeare's sense is to be established. There is more of Proteus in it than in Prince Henry, more enigma and dissimulation (because it is natural and involuntary dissimulation) than in Hamlet. It is a nature easily known in itself, but very difficult to fathom in the mainspring of its being. The poet has treated it in such full detail, he has brought it into such a great variety of situations, he has thought it out more deeply than most of his characters; but, at the same time, he has given so little immediate information towards the comprehension of the character, that it must chiefly be known by the facts, which is always the more difficult way. Viewed from his many different sides, Shakespeare has caused this many-sided being to make the most varied impression on the most different men, an impression expressed in the most opposite manner in words and works; the impression the poet

himself conceived of him he has left us to guess. We will, therefore, first clear our way through the facts.

It is sufficiently evident how well fitted was a man so gifted as Antony to be placed in the great conflict between activity and enjoyment, between the government of the world, and the being governed by a common, but powerful passion. If the active power conquers in such a nature, in such a position, the result will be an Alexandrian gift of political organisation, impulsion, and new creation in all the ramifications of life, a ready understanding and furtherance of the most manifold arrangements of all practical and theoretical matters. If such a nature turns to laxness and repose, there will then be the most extraordinary waste of external and internal riches on the meanest gratifications; a master of enjoyment will be formed; because that many-sidedness will now be displayed in the art of varying pleasures and spicing them with ever new ingenuity. Now, with regard to the active power of Antony, we have already seen, in Julius Cæsar, the proofs of his diplomatic skill, demagogic eloquence, and warlike readiness. In this sphere of life, however, he was placed beside a man, the young Octavius, who even then treated him, the elder in politics and war, with haughtiness; in whose vicinity his genius (that is, the practical, actively disposed part of his genius) felt itself oppressed, and before whom his courage, his nobility, his magnanimity, bowed, although unwillingly. An inward misgiving warned the more profound Julius Cæsar against Cassius; it needed a soothsayer to warn this superficial being against Octavius; as Cæsar in his pride disclaims fear, so Antony pays no attention to the loud voice within him, when his presumption and self-conceit return, as soon as he is absent from Octavius. With regard, on the other side, to the repose and love of enjoyment in Antony, we find him, at the very beginning of our play, at the court of Cleopatra entangled in voluptuousness and luxury, and we have an opportunity of observing how he moves in this sphere. We see him placed beside a woman who, in contrast to the sober communion of rule with Octavius, offered him an intoxication of delight, who rivalled him in the rarest attractions and perfections, in whose society his genius (of course that part of his genius devoted to enjoyment) felt itself stimulated and shook its wings. If originally Antony's activity and laxness, 'his taints and honours,' as Mæcenas said at his death, 'waged equal

with him,' this connection alone would have given preponderance to the bad side.

We will leave it undetermined whether Shakespeare himself asserted this original balance of opposite gifts in Antony; from his words it might seem that he did; from the facts the preponderance seems everywhere on the weak side. From the beginning, even in Julius Cæsar, we see him everywhere needing a prop, a supporter, never able to stand alone. At first he is quite dependent on Cæsar. As soon as Cæsar has fallen he sends for Octavius, who has already arrived unsummoned. Immediately he becomes dependent on him. His wife Fulvia managed him arbitrarily; she appears to him 'a great spirit.' After her death, by the rising of Lucius Pompeius he is unwillingly drawn back into the political whirlpool; before he has decided he tries to unite himself with Pompey; at the same time he tears himself away from Egypt, to try and join Octavius once more; he catches at the sister of his enemy as at a new staff, only to procure peace and repose, and scope for enjoyment. His imitation of Hercules or Bacchus refers to this trait; he leans against a tutelar god, who, according to Shakespeare and to Plutarch, turns from him when he is to perish. With a nature thus ever needing support, he encounters this paragon of female weakness, Cleopatra, like ivy leaning on ivy. He knows her nature, and is aware that it can yield him no support, but he is soon so entwined by the parasitical plant—his senses, his inclinations, his humours are so entangled—that he, who should sustain the world as 'a triple pillar,' loses his own strength, nay, even the inclination to seek a *firm* support, and soon sinks together with the creeping plant upon the ground, and with the woman he becomes a woman.

Never were a pair of human beings more wonderfully formed for each other than these. In outward form they appear as miracles, even to the unprejudiced. Not alone does the enraptured Cleopatra find that nature created her masterpiece in Antony, and that to imagine him was 'nature's piece 'gainst fancy,' but even the displeased Philo calls him a Mars; and she, again, is compared by Enobarbus with the picture of 'that Venus, where we see the fancy outwork nature.' To both, likewise, there is ascribed, besides this beauty of form, that of movement; the utmost loveliness and grace distinguish them; everything is charming and becoming in both; *she* discovers that the violence of sadness and mirth, and the mingling of both,

become him as 'no man else;' and *he* 'that to chide, to laugh, to weep,—everything becomes her.' Enobarbus declared that 'vilest things become themselves in her; the holy priests bless her when she is riggish.' Anyone who finds it difficult to understand Shakespeare's sonnets to his black and ugly beauty should compare this picture of the brown 'gipsy,' for which the former might have sat. What enhances the rare charms of both is that age could not wither them: she says of herself that she is

> with Phœbus' amorous pinches black,
> And wrinkled deep in time:

in *him* white hairs are mixed with his brown ones; but even these setting suns have warmth for one another. Nay, even because this is a last love, it makes those who are cooling more glowing, and the faithless more faithful, and Antony enthusiastically hopes, when about to die, that they shall be an admired pair of lovers in Elysium, that 'with their sprightly port they shall make ghosts gaze; that Dido and her Æneas shall want troops, and all the haunt be theirs.' Thus a perpetual charm for the eye, they were as attractive also for the ear. Shakespeare makes Cleopatra say of Antony, that 'his voice was propertied as all the tuned spheres;' Plutarch says the same of Cleopatra. But all that nature had made thus attractive to the senses was increased by art and expenditure in every conceivable mode of fascination. He laid the riches of the East at her feet, she expended her wealth with frantic extravagance in festivities for him. When she first met him on the Cydnus, lying in a splendid barge surrounded by Cupids and Nereids, dressed with excessive pomp, or when she feasted and sported with him, laughed him into patience or out of patience, changed clothes with him and wandered all night through the streets, or when she merrily angled with him and quickly varied her amusement, whilst music gave a charm to conversation, through all we see that variety and change were provided for every sense, and everything combined to enchant. In this art of enjoyment the spirit of both is ever fresh and young; Cleopatra's especially is inexhaustible in invention, alternation, and diversion: 'custom cannot stale her infinite variety;' endless as her passion for pleasure were the means she found to gratify it. If she could still charm 'where most she satisfied,' what must her attractions have been when the first favour was

still withheld! Long after she was quite sure of him, the artful courtesan spiced her multiform flatteries with acrimony, reproaches, and mockery, with the sting of jealousy, so that even her well-schooled attendants were alarmed at her bold game, and earnestly implored her 'to cross him in nothing.' This she knew was 'the way to lose him;' she did not need the instructions of Antony's male flatterers, who mixed their praise with freedom and blame in order to avoid inspiring satiety and disgust. And so she held back at the beginning of their intimacy; there was a time when he must implore to be allowed to stay with her, when she threw out the bait, but when he had, as it were, to beg permission to bite at it. When these seeming barriers were thrown down, both rushed together in rapture, as she says:—

> Eternity was in our lips and eyes;
> Bliss in our brows' bent; none our parts so poor,
> But was a race of heaven!

Henceforth they testified to the world that in the art of the enjoyment of life and love none 'stood up so peerless' as they; and Antony utters the resolve that henceforth 'not a minute of their lives should stretch without some pleasure,' and to this is added the characteristic principle which is the soul of this life: 'the earth alike feeds beast as man;' the 'nobleness of life,' the difference between beast and man, is this very superiority in the delights of love!

At the commencement of our play, Antony is balancing between his political vocation and his joy in Egypt; but his inclination is already perfectly decided. It is a torment to him to hear of Rome, he neglects the messages of Octavius; for all that he cares 'Rome may in Tiber melt, and the wide arch of the rang'd empire may fall;—here is his space.' But he neglected the messengers of Octavius only from a passing emotion of shame, because Cleopatra taunted him with his subjection to Octavius; he then makes amends for his fault in diplomatic style without derogating from his dignity. The news from Rome arouses him. His wife Fulvia had taken the heroic step of stirring up a war against Octavius to force him out of his Eastern bondage; she played the man whilst he played the woman; in Asia, Parthia was lost through his indolence; a new rival for the world's dominion was rising up in Sextus Pompeius. Antony hears this heavy news with

composure and tranquillity; he still has feelings of shame and honour, and an abhorrence of disgrace; he still retains enough ambition to assert himself in the triumvirate with Octavius against the new rival; he rouses himself to break Cleopatra's chains, that he may not be quite lost in the delirium of love. The poet makes him waver still more; he adds to his former indecision the news of Fulvia's death. This opens to him a prospect of remaining with Cleopatra in peace, and certainly he had desired this death; now, on the contrary, amid so many great recollections, he longs for her back again, although he permits the hard Enobarbus to speak lightly and with congratulations of her death. His resolution remains firm to quit the enchantress, that greater mischief may not spring from his indolence; he wishes he had never seen her. His friend Enobarbus is in the same state of irresolution as himself; he thinks it a pity to cast the women here in Egypt away for nothing; 'though between them and a great cause they should be esteemed nothing.' Antony arms himself against Cleopatra's attacks and her artifices; he calmly explains his affairs to her; he shows that he also has not forgotten his old art of persuasion, he uses the death of Fulvia to make his going away easier and less suspicious. The call of honour and manly resolution so far triumphs that he actually goes, to the astonishment of Pompey, who had expected that his voluptuous life would be his ruin. And Antony really was so entangled already, that he departs with the promise to make all his plans dependent upon *her; she* is to decide for peace or war. He sends a message to assure her that he will lay the whole of the East at her feet; and whilst the statesmanlike Octavius receives news every hour concerning the state of the political world, Antony establishes a chain of daily messages to Cleopatra in Egypt. The impression is that he goes away only to pacify the storm of disturbances, and to make way for the peaceful enjoyment of his pleasures in the East; as if his inroad into the world of action were only to ensure for him the world of enjoyment. And this is confirmed by the whole course of his affairs in the West.

The scene of his conference with Octavius (Act. II. sc. 2) is excellently managed. It is a counterpart to the meeting of the quarrelling Brutus and Cassius; we there have the conversation between two friends, who are indeed divided by difference of disposition, but only temporarily by temper and misunder-

standing; here we have another conference between cold and adverse diplomatists, who are for ever divided by a deep diversity of nature; and one of whom is oppressed, to his own evil consciousness, by the superiority of the other. Plutarch's declaration that Antony's genius always bowed to that of Octavius could not be evidenced more finely than it is here. The attempt of the former to assert his dignity and equality is evident throughout, yet he entirely submits in the material points of the transaction; he confesses the point in dispute and 'plays the penitent,' although in a reserved manner; by this confession he will do no prejudice to his 'greatness,' and he calls his confessions by the more honourable name of 'honesty;' gladly and without objection he falls in with the highly critical offer of Octavius' sister in marriage. In all this he is not premeditatedly false and deceitful, any more than when in the presence of Brutus he stood with deep emotion over Cæsar's corpse; then he acted with involuntary tact, cleverly and boldly, according to the state of things; here, in presence of his all-powerful rival, he acts also, but not with tact, not cleverly, not boldly, but over-mastered by yielding weakness. And here there was no honourable motive for his acting a part, as his undissembled love for Cæsar had impelled him then—here there was only a longing to return to his coquettish friend in Egypt. His blunt follower Enobarbus, whose plain truths Antony bears in private but will not listen to before others, who follows everywhere the deep dissembler, the hypocrite disguised even to himself, this man discovers immediately that this peace is only patched up for a time, until the two triumvirs have got rid of Pompey; he perceives as clearly that Antony has only married Octavia for the sake of his interest, that this marriage will not loosen his connection with Cleopatra, but will be 'the very strangler of his amity' with the Cæsarian family. Antony himself makes the blunt confession that he only concluded this marriage for the sake of peace and tranquillity; his pleasure lies in Egypt. He had snatched himself thence in an effervescence of honourable feeling; but it was only an apparent victory over his passion. The relapse is all the more shocking, and the dissolution of his remaining strength the more certain and paralysing now that an evil conscience reproaches him for the flagitious conduct with which he breaks the ties of friendship and marriage, formed under the mask of repentance and honour.

He picks a quarrel with Octavius; he sends his sister, whose heart is painfully divided between husband and brother, coldly and heartlessly to Rome; deludes her with intentional falsehood, and dismisses her with the venomous words, 'Let your best love draw to that point which seeks best to preserve it.' Not to him, therefore, who hastens, as soon as she has left him, back to Egypt! With extraordinary thoughtlessness he makes himself guilty of deceit, perjury, and adultery, thus offending his powerful rival; nay, he even attacks the honour of the state and of the gods. He places his children with Cleopatra as monarchs in Egypt, and bestows upon them the kingdoms of the East; sitting publicly beside Cleopatra, in the habiliments of the goddess Isis, criminally sporting with everything sacred.

Here then is the tragic turning point of his fortune; here vengeance overtakes him. The very means by which he hoped to secure peace caused discord and led to his fall. Warned in vain by Octavius, he made 'the cement' of their new love 'the ram to batter the fortress of it.' A double profligacy, a moral and a political one, lay at this turning point in this political marriage and its results, and it drew down upon Antony his fate. The political profligacy belongs to the intellectual idea of the play, and consequently a greater emphasis is laid upon it. If Antony (and it is his rival who makes this remark) incurred moral responsibility alone, if he 'only filled his vacancy with his voluptuousness,' the natural consequences would 'call on him for it;' but to 'confound such time' and his high calling makes him deserve

> to be chid
> As we rate boys; who, being mature in knowledge,
> Pawn their experience to their present pleasure,
> And so rebel to judgment.

In these words the emphasis is laid chiefly on Antony's political sins, and the contrast aimed at between the active life of the world and the corrupt seeking for enjoyment is brought out strongly. The relation of the idea of the play to that of Julius Cæsar shows this still more clearly. In Brutus public interests stood before his private ones, and this only too much; in Antony, on the contrary, his public honour vanishes before his private pleasures; he gives himself entirely up to dependence on Cleopatra, and not himself alone, but that part of the world which fell to his share; his sword becomes weak through his

voluptuousness, and he imprecates curses and ruin on Rome, as Cleopatra does on Egypt, if only his love may prosper. It pleased him to play the part of Hercules, but he plays it only in his connection with Omphale. In Brutus there was the noble struggle between the highest political and moral duties; but here (and this is the original fault in the subject) the struggle is between political duty and immoral passion, two powers too dissimilar in themselves, the worst of which entirely conquers. The poet makes political ruin follow closely on Antony's political crime; immediately, stroke upon stroke. Octavius gets rid of Lepidus and Pompey, and suddenly appears as an all-powerful adversary before the helpless Antony, who has no one to fight on his side but the coquettish woman. She 'takes,' as Enobarbus says, 'from his heart, from his brain, and from his time, what should not then be spared;' crime and presumption ruin his understanding; his want of understanding ruins his fortune; he offers single combat and a battle on land to Octavius at Pharsalia, which Octavius prudently declines; and he foolishly accepts Octavius' challenge to a sea-fight, in which his talents did not lie, and from which all skilful warriors endeavour to dissuade him: all but Cleopatra, who flees while the fight is still undecided, and whom he 'like a doting mallard' follows. Experience, manhood, honour, never were so shamefully violated as here; 'the greater cantle of the world is lost, with very ignorance;' kingdoms and provinces are 'kissed away!' Thus the warriors think, who desert from Antony. He himself is so altered by shame that he fancies the very earth is ashamed to bear him.

And yet, in this degradation, he thinks a tear of Cleopatra's 'rates all that is won and lost;' a kiss would repay him for everything. He now would be content if Octavius would 'let him breathe a private man in Athens.' But his enjoyment and repose are to be embittered not only in the disputes of the world, but in their very spring. Military glory and dominion were lost in the battle of Actium; in Egypt the last traces of equanimity and the shadow of his fortune with Cleopatra are to disappear. We return, therefore, in the last two acts, exclusively to the personal relations between these two, in which, under all the varnish of happiness, there was from the beginning a dark tinge of dissatisfaction, through all their harmony a creeping discord, through all their love mistrust and suspicion, through all their idleness 'sweating labour,' and in all their enjoy-

ments a root of discontent. And this for the simple reason that in spite of all the ornament of exterior grace and the evident arts of pleasing, that inner adornment and worth of character was lacking, on which alone true love, true fidelity, and true happiness can be founded. Great princes before Antony had trembled, 'kissing' the charming hand of Cleopatra; Cæsar had been in her toils; Pompey had looked into her eyes. Antony knew this. She had angled for him with cunning skill in her declining days; he knew her to be artful beyond men's thoughts, and called her his 'serpent;' but he had allowed her to enchant him, and to vanquish him, well knowing that he too was a conqueror in that warfare. So she knows him too to be infirm of purpose, and a deep dissembler; she knows he did not love Fulvia, and, therefore, does not trust in his love for herself; she wished to separate him from his lawful spouse, and when the first is dead he takes a second. *If* on one side he is 'painted like a Mars' to her, 't' other way he's a Gorgon.' Thus they both know each other to be unworthy of confidence, and yet they trust each other and then find reason for upbraidings; they know of each other that faithlessness and changeableness are natural to them, but they entangle each other more and more with the tendrils of their passion, in order that, though faithless to others, they may be the more true to one another; in the hour of trial, however, they have no faith in each other. The very trouble which they take to fix what they know to be untrue incites them mutually to raise their fidelity even to passionateness and frightful jealousy, in which they again nourish suspicion against each other's truth. The poet has woven a wonderful psychological web out of this rare and yet most natural contradiction, and there is great art and knowledge in the manner in which he displays how the passion of both increases by this ever-recurring mistrust; how they ennoble an ignoble connection by this straining and strengthening of their fidelity, how their personal nobleness sometimes rises and sometimes sinks by it, and how, when they make the greatest sacrifice in their unblessed union, it drags them down to destruction. Cleopatra's mistrust of Antony is greatest when he is successful; his of her when she is in misfortune. In the scenes of the first act she employs all her arts and all the contrivances of her jealousy to keep him, but she yields willingly as soon as she perceives that he is bent on going. If her behaviour in these scenes was far from noble, it becomes utterly

degraded on the news of Antony's re-marriage. She has none of the man's power to bear ill news calmly, and to separate the messenger from his message; she curses the bringer of the news; she strikes him, tears his hair, and even threatens his life. Although everything became her, this rage does not; the goddess is suddenly changed into a fury, and does not become calm again until she discovers from the description of the modest, holy, widowed Octavia that she is no object of jealousy. The companion scene to this is given by Antony when he surprises Cleopatra in bestowing a calculated slight mark of favour upon the ambassador of Octavius, who promises her a favourable hearing if she will kill or dismiss Antony. Octavius hoped thus to destroy his adversary, for he did not build much upon the constancy of women in good fortune, much less in trouble. This same opinion might have frightfully excited Antony's jealousy and suspicion. At the very moment when she is about to secure favour for him and for herself from the conqueror he furiously accuses her of unchastity. In this scene his conduct and all that was royal in him sinks into baseness, and the Gorgon in his nature appears. As he here ruins by his jealousy a prospect of deliverance, which she in her own battle-field might perhaps have won for both, she by her jealousy had previously lost the battle of Actium, which, perhaps, if left to himself, he might have won; to which, according to Plutarch, jealousy had driven her, in order that a reconciliation with Octavia might be prevented. The fate and life of both is at last decided by an involuntary repetition of Cleopatra's blameable flight at sea near Actium. The last event was caused by the state of distraction to which misfortune had brought them both. Antony had lost his head at Actium; here far more. He again challenges Octavius to fight with him, being foolish enough to think he would resign his better fortune to make a show with a gladiator. He flogs Octavius' ambassador. He dares, in desperation, a final battle, and incites his people with a night of revelling, thinking to animate them by a touching address which only weakens them. He is brave and cast down by turns, as his fading fortunes inspire hope or fear. He wins an unexpected victory by land, and here Shakespeare invests him with the ostentation which Plutarch makes, as it were, the central point of his character. The striking contrast to Macbeth is evident; Macbeth, in misfortune, growing poor in words as his deeds increase, while Antony perishes uttering

high-sounding words. During the last flickerings of fortune he hears that his fleet has deserted; the effect of that first disgrace at Actium is repeated here. Without inquiry he ascribes it to Cleopatra's treachery, and thinks of revenge and death for her, supposing she has sold him to Octavius. The fury of jealousy possesses him again, and, like his god Hercules, he feels upon him 'the shirt of Nessus.' He rages as if he were Othello and had a Desdemona for his wife, although shortly before he had shown how well he knows her. Cleopatra escapes from his wrath, and in order to bring him to himself feigns herself dead. She too, who was once all caution, prudence, and discretion, now loses her senses. Too late she recollects that her plan was too severe, and she forebodes the consequences. After his first outbreak of jealousy she had pacified him with a word, because the weakling could not for a moment bear the thought of a separation from her: now the report of her death drove the desperate man after her, to earn forgiveness with tears. Not so quickly does *she* resolve to follow him when he is really dead. She has still plans of deliverance; she still hides some of her treasures from Cæsar, and boldly lies to his face while concealing them; it is not till she becomes certain that she is destined to adorn his triumph that she puts herself to death. The death of both is, according to the opinion of their enemies, the best in them. Nevertheless, we cannot dwell upon it with elevated feelings. The fate of Brutus has revengingly befallen Antony; he utters many lofty words about his design, a Roman vanquished by a Roman; his page is to slay him like Brutus, and the boy prefers falling on his own sword, *without one word*, thus showing himself 'thrice nobler' than he who now must kill himself, and strikes with no certain aim. In like manner Iras precedes her mistress, setting the example of self-destruction, an action by which Cleopatra also finds herself shamed. Her death, like her love, her jealousy, her life, is notoriously studied, calculated, prepared, planned; even the separation from life made an enjoyment; painlessly the asp sucks her breast, as a babe 'that sucks the nurse asleep.' Charmian emulates her in this 'noble weakness,' when she, already poisoned, tremblingly stood trimming up the diadem on her dead mistress.

In this our exposition of the issue of the pair, according to the play, everyone must be aware that the strictest justice is satisfied in the events. According to the expressions it

might indeed appear as if too much light were cast upon Antony; as if the æsthetic object of elevating somewhat the principal character had led to a conflict with the ethical truth. We might imagine that Shakespeare, in laying the foundation of this character, had, contrary to his usual view of life, laid too much stress upon the passive being and natural disposition of man, instead of on activity, on the man in motion, and on the use of innate gifts, since it sometimes seems as if Antony's hereditary good qualities were to be reckoned as meritorious virtues, while his evil ones on the contrary were designated as pardonable weaknesses. It is necessary, therefore, for us to observe in whose mouth the various opinions concerning him are placed. We shall certainly not listen to Cleopatra, when she sees him stride over land and sea like a god, when she praises his power, his goodness, and above all his bounty, and when she says that of him which is the most evident untruth, that his delights in which he perished like dolphins showed their backs above the element they lived in. The weak Lepidus, who made the best of everything, says of him that 'there are not evils enough to darken all his goodness.' At his death, at the moment when even his conqueror Octavius is touched, the noble enemies Mæcenas and Agrippa express this mild judgment:—

> His taints and honours
> Waged equal with him. A rarer spirit never
> Did steer humanity: but you, gods, will give us
> Some faults to make us men.

Antony's sub-officers, among them Ventidius, designate the weaknesses of his petty ambition, and spare him. Others of his soldiers, like Philo, mention unreservedly the disgraceful situation of the triumvir, who has become the fool and the paramour of the gipsy. Pompey expects and wishes that

> Sleep and feeding may prorogue his honour,
> Even till a Lethe'd dulness.

One of his dependants, Canidius, deserts him early; the other, Enobarbus, does not leave him until his tutelar god has forsaken him; the third, Eros, is true to him until death. Thus this man of many sides and many meanings makes a different impression upon everyone; it may be asked on whom he makes the most correct one. His enemy Octavius, who knows him best, does not judge him worst. He speaks of him as 'the

abstract of all faults that all men follow; he accepts unwillingly but yieldingly that praise of Antony, that everything becomes him; that man's 'composure must be rare indeed' whom the low pleasures to which he was addicted could not blemish. He glances disapprovingly but forbearingly at the moral shadows that fall upon him. But he finds his whole conduct unpardonable when he looks upon his political vocation. If this lays open to us the main point of view in reference to Antony, in so far as we see him in relation to his position in the world, Antony himself, on the other hand, furnishes in a remarkable manner the ultimatum concerning his personality, his character in itself; and in this we must recognise the poet's own judgment upon him. And this was surprisingly well comprehended in a nature not inaccessible to truth, which assumed involuntarily a dissembling exterior, and consequently appeared different to different people; a nature which equally involuntarily received glimpses of knowledge from without, and unintentionally displayed the result of this self-knowledge in various situations. In the first scene (Act I.) in his intoxication he uttered the opinion that refinement in the pleasures of love made the sole difference between man and beast; in the second scene, when he has come to himself and has been 'eared' by bad news from Rome, he utters on the contrary what strongly condemns his pleasures: 'we bring forth weeds when our quiet winds lie still.' When he has trifled away his fortune, and lost all the healthy tact and instinct of action which was once peculiar to him, he indicates in his rage against Cleopatra his wretched fall by these bitter words:—

> When we in our viciousness grow hard,
> (O misery on 't) the wise gods seal our eyes;
> In our own filth drop our clear judgments; make us
> Adore our errors; laugh at us, while we strut
> To our confusion.

And at last, just before his death, looking upon his situation, he compares it with the evening clouds, which deceive the eye first with one shape, then another, and then vanish into nothing. And by nothing more striking than this poetical image could the poet, in full accordance with Plutarch, comprise his judgment respecting the whole life of this man, who astonished and deceived the world with his splendid nothingness, with his seeming greatness and seeming nobleness, in a thousand changing forms.

History came to the help of Shakespeare, inasmuch as it imposed upon him, in the domain of the busy world, no over preponderating character which, as a contrast, would have pressed too strongly on the effeminate Antony. His Octavius, therefore, is as skilfully made use of in an æsthetical point of view, as he is delineated with historical truth. Schlegel has justly extolled Shakespeare for having even in Julius Cæsar perfectly seen through this character, without suffering himself to be led astray by the fortune and the glory of Augustus. We are not likely to be too enthusiastically biassed in favour of the activity of political life by this grave diplomatist and his conquest over his pleasure-seeking opponent, on whom his fantastic heroism and his excessive passionateness cast a poetic brilliancy. Octavius owes his success more to Antony's luxuriousness, idleness, and frenzy than to his own merits. Shakespeare makes Octavius himself acknowledge the intellectual superiority of Antony, when he says 'his thoughts did kindle mine.' But the use he made of his gifts shows advantageously in contrast to Antony. Protected by colder blood from the spur of voluptuousness, he has also with well-principled sobriety defended himself from being overtaken by wine, this washing of the brain by which 'it grows fouler.' These peculiarities of disposition and habit give him a natural superiority over Antony. Where the latter is genial and wanton, Octavius is full of petty carefulness; where the one idly, voluptuously, and madly puts off, neglects, and forgets every public duty, the other is all conscientiousness, economy, activity, and thoughtful quickness, and is prompted at least as much by the common interests of the state as by personal ambition. He complains of Antony's levity, because it is incomprehensible to him, and contrary to his nature, although he might rejoice at it as being advantageous to himself. So long as he needs him to set against Pompey he is considerate towards him, and seriously tries to conciliate and to attach him to himself. When discord threatens he cunningly and carefully avoids exposing himself to any reproaches; he could prove by his letters with what difficulty he had been drawn into the new war, how mildly and calmly he had written. But as soon as Antony gives him threefold cause of offence, insulting his family, disgracing the state, and ruining entirely his renown, he sees that the aim of his autocratic ambition is reached; he now sacrifices his sister to his political objects, displays an unexampled activity, sets aside Pompey and

Lepidus, startles with his haste the hitherto more hasty Antony, suffers not himself to be led astray by false honour to accept his adventurous challenges, but follows up the beaten track of fortune with discreet circumspection, although with a full determination to destroy Antony and to humble Cleopatra as much as possible.

The ways and means by which the private affairs of the lovers are united with public matters and history, and by which the play is made into a story, are as simple as they are masterly. By its connection and close relations with the East, by the contagion of the frugal West with Asiatic luxury, the Roman state perished, as well as its triumvir Antony. Shakespeare has shown this dangerous influence in the case of the upright Enobarbus. This nature is that of a soldier of the old Roman times: hard, bold, dryly humorous, without ceremony or compliment, upright and true towards friend and foe, as well towards the pirate Menas as towards the enchantress Cleopatra and his commander Antony. His sound knowledge of human nature is sufficient to enable him to see through the whole inner web of his enigmatical master, but he is helpless in the presence of the artful Cleopatra. The witchery of her character lays hold of him, as far as his nature permits, as it does afterwards of Dolabella. He thinks her passion for Antony is composed of the finest elements of purest love; he is deceived by the pains she takes to retain the inconstant one; when she assures Thyreus that her 'honour was not yielded, but conquered merely,' this seems to him so earnest and true that he questions his lord about it. Even to this plain, blunt nature the Eastern manners are as dangerous as to the better adapted Antony; in the society of eunuchs, of servants obedient to a glance, like Alexas, of those frivolous women Iras and Charmian, who thoroughly understand their vocation, even the roughest are injured. The rude soldier feels himself comfortable on the soft Egyptian couch; he also is soon, like his master, sorely divided in the choice between women and business, between resting and going; if love has no charms for him, the wines of Egypt have the more. This better Roman nature is struggling with the inward weakness that has come over him when Antony's good fortune is waning. He finds that 'loyalty well held to fools makes faith mere folly,' yet fidelity triumphs at last over prudence; he intends to conquer the conqueror of his master with honourable endurance, and to 'earn a place in

the story.' But then Antony's misfortunes corrupt even this honest servant. Antony sends his treasures after him, when he had abandoned him. This magnanimity wounds the true heart, that had but lately left the long trodden path of honour; he now feels with shame that in the book of history he can only rank in register as a 'master-leaver' and a fugitive, and he kills himself.

To this example of the decline of Rome's ancient virtue is added the insurrection of Sextus Pompeius, through whom this piece is connected, by a fine thread, with Julius Cæsar. During the contentions of Cæsar's two heirs, the people's love woke again for the dead Pompey, and was transferred to his son; the malcontents assemble round Sextus, who once again raised the standard of the republic, where 'they would have one man but a man.' But what manner of men arise here for the good cause in the places of Brutus and Cassius? The young Pompey, a frank but thoughtless soul, the image of political levity, opposed to the moderate Octavius, fights for the cause of freedom in company with pirates, foolishly brave, without friends. He cannot wait for the consequences of the discord between Octavius and Antony; he knows that his insurrection even re-unites them; but wantonly and vainly he thinks all the better of himself because he is able to force Antony out of Egypt. This confidence rests on the predictions of hope, on the command of the sea, on the love of the people, on all the most deceitful things in the world. In the first words we hear him utter he shows himself less pious than the pirates, in the last action in which we see him, less impious than they. Menas advises him, according to historical tradition, to kill the triumvirs on board his ship at a banquet. He would have been glad had Menas done this without asking him; but, being asked, he will not break his honour for his advantage. Menas opposes him, as Brutus opposed Cassius, with the reproach that he did not like the means necessary to the end. But what a falling off from such men as those—from those republicans to these! As Pompey understands the cause of freedom, he is satisfied, not that one man should be as good as another, but that he himself should be equal to the mightiest. And while he looks with half-envious glances at Antony's pleasures in the East, while he entertains the men who agree to give him a small part of their dominion, he shows what an adept he is in the revels and debaucheries that are bringing Rome to ruin.

There is nothing more admirable than the historical symbolism of this banquet scene. First of all the weak 'triple pillar' of the world, Lepidus, is carried off; they have made him drink 'alms-drink,' that is, the share of wine which one man drinks instead of another to relieve him, respecting which Warburton found a striking satire on his being taken into the triumvirate in order to divert envy from the others. At the same time Antony and Enobarbus intoxicate their senses with wine, performing Egyptian Bacchanals. And on the other side Pompey trifles away his fortune in an honest cheerful mood. Between them stands Octavius, observant, without interrupting the merriment. Even *he* splits his words, but his mind is clear, and his senses sober, and he moralises thus: 'Our graver business frowns at this levity.'

CORIOLANUS.

We have no certain external means of settling the date of Coriolanus, but the style, and a few expressions and passages which recall contemporary plays, allow of a few conjectures, and these almost all combine to place the piece about the year 1610.

Fondness for the Roman state, whose mighty career Shakespeare contemplates in this play with the proud satisfaction of one belonging to it, seems to have induced the poet, after the completion of Antony and Cleopatra, to take up once more the better days of the first military greatness of this people, and to treat a more noble subject out of its history. As in Antony he had represented the imperial time and its degeneracy, and in Cæsar the struggle of the republic with monarchy, in Coriolanus he brings before us the struggle between the aristocratic and the democratic elements within the republic. The play is filled with the striving of the two powers, tribunes and consuls, plebeians and patricians, senate and people; the complaints and reproaches customary between ruler and subjects, between official and privileged persons and those who bear the burden and perform the labours, are evenly balanced against each other. The opposition between these two powers is everywhere exhibited as founded on their nature; the implacable enmity between them is shown as a necessary result of the imprudence, unreasonableness, and harshness of their contrast. The inconstancy in the people is contrasted with the obstinacy, the one-sidedness, and the scorn in the representative of aristocracy; the dishonesty on the one side is opposed to the boundless ambition on the other, proud contempt to envious hatred, deep desire of revenge to the passing intoxication of retaliation, the lingering grudge to the superficial repentance. The incompatibility of the higher and stronger nature with the weaker and lower is described; for this is inevitable, unless on one side wise modesty condescends,

and on the other grateful respect for merit elevates. The contrasts and contentions of these two political states and powers are so thoroughly treated of in our play, that this very struggle of the aristocratic and democratic principles has usually been considered as the spirit of it, as if the leading thought of the poet had been a purely political one. But it always seemed to us that these three Roman plays were so highly and generally estimated, just on account of the elevation of history to pure drama, the union of the political idea with a moral one, and the mixture of historical with psychological excellence. We are inclined to believe that those political relations are inherent in the subject, and form with it that general foundation on which the actual centre of the piece must first be sought. The internal connection of the three plays and their themes with one another will quickly place this in a clear light. In Julius Cæsar the political subject was the struggle of the republic with monarchy; within this general subject of the great *historical* action we were, however, attracted by the sharp discord between a political and a moral duty, which affects the hero of the play and which is the kernel of the real *dramatic* action. In Antony and Cleopatra the historical theme is the struggle of the active Roman spirit against the influx of oriental effeminacy, and here, we may say, the political and the moral centre coincided; Antony's individual hesitation between his active vocation in the world and his pursuit of sensual enjoyment is the first great symptom of the like state of the times. In Coriolanus the political basis is the struggle between the aristocratic and democratic elements; in this struggle the hero finds himself placed in a situation where he has to choose between his patriotism and his private feelings of hatred. Brutus renounced his friendship with Cæsar, the supposed enemy of his country, out of greater devotion to his country, being as noble in policy as he was mistaken in morals; Antony renounced friendships that were useful to his country, and formed others that were injurious, being both in policy and morals equally easy and negligent; Coriolanus renounced an enmity with the enemy of his people, to the ruin of his country, being politically and morally hardened in selfishness. The sort of characters which have to decide in these situations, and the prominent qualities in them, by means of which they decide in this way or in that, this is everywhere the actual centre towards which the poet worked, and his leading thought here,

as we everywhere demonstrate, is of a moral psychological nature. Brutus' really difficult choice is decided by the fundamental firmness and uprightness of a truly manly mind; Antony's choice, which ought to be no choice, is, in strong contrast to Brutus, decided by the unmanly weakness and meanness of an effeminate voluptuary; Coriolanus, again, in double contrast to both, is guided by the lofty pride and high ambition of a manly character, in which an excess of selfishness unnaturally tends to unbending obstinacy which blunts itself. In Brutus, the noblest citizen contended with the noblest man; in Antony, the sensualist celebrated his triumph over the citizen summoned to action; in Coriolanus, the sensitive man and the good citizen is subdued by a heroism exaggerated by pride. A heroism, we say, because indeed the physical qualities and characteristics of Coriolanus surpass, as in heroic times, ordinary human greatness; an exaggerated heroism, we added, because, compared with similar descriptions of similar relations in the heroic ages, this stands prominent in the might of passion. Homer's enraged Meleager and Achilles, in like scorn and obstinacy, soften when they see fire carried into the friendly city or ships; Coriolanus is ready to throw the fire-brand with his own hand into his native city.

Even if we give up our usual plan of seeking in every one of Shakespeare's dramas a fundamental moral view, it is by no means unimportant, in forming a judgment on this play, whether we take the political or the psychological idea as the basis for our consideration. If we take the political struggle between the two orders to be the main point, we shall readily arrive at wrong conclusions. To instance only one. We see Coriolanus, as the chief representative of the aristocracy, in strong opposition to the people and the tribunes; hence we naturally take up the view expressed by Hazlitt, that Shakespeare had a leaning to the arbitrary side of the question, to the aristocratical principle, inasmuch as he does not dwell on the truths he tells of the nobles in the same proportion as he does on those he tells of the people. Hazlitt has added excellent grounds for proving even the naturalness and need of this inclination in the poet. He showed that the poetic imagination is an exaggerating, exclusive, aristocratic faculty, that the principle of poetry is everywhere an anti-levelling principle, that the lion which attacks a flock of sheep is a far more poeti-

cal object than the flock, that we feel more admiration for the proud, arbitrary man than for the humble crowd that bow before him, for the oppressor rather than for the oppressed. All this is very true, and seems to gain more force by its application to Coriolanus. But Shakespeare's poetry is always so closely connected with morality, his imaginative power is so linked with sound reason, his ideal is so full of actual truth, that his poetry seemed to us always distinguished from all other poetry exactly by this: that there is nothing exclusive in it, that candour and impartiality are the most prominent marks of the poet and his poetry, that if imagination even with him strives sometimes after effect, exists by contrasts, and admits no middle course, yet in the very placing, describing, and colouring of the highest poetical contrasts, there appears ever for the moral judgment that golden mean of impartiality which is the precious prerogative of the truly wise. Shakespeare has depicted the man of freedom, Brutus, nay, even the harder master-spirit of the revolution, Cassius, far nobler and with much more love than the man of the aristocracy, Coriolanus. It will be allowed that, from the example of Brutus, many more would be won over to the cause of the people than would be won over to aristocratic principles by Coriolanus. If we regard Coriolanus not merely in reference to the many, but if we weigh his character in itself and with itself, we must confess, after the closest consideration, that personified aristocracy is here represented in its noblest and in its worst side, with that impartiality which Shakespeare's nature could scarcely avoid. It may be replied, the people are not so depicted. Yet even on the nobles as a body our poet has just as little thrown a favourable light at last; for it lies in the nature of things that a multitude can never be compared with one man who is to be the subject of poetical representation, and who, on that very account, must stand alone, one single man distinguished from the many. But it may be said, the representatives of the people, the tribunes also, are not thus impartially depicted. Yet where would have been the poetic harmony, if Shakespeare had made these prominent? where the truth, if he had given dignity and energy to a new power created in a tumult? where our sympathy in his hero, if he had placed a Marcus Brutus in opposition to him in the tribunate? In proportion as he had raised our interest in the tribunes, he would have withdrawn it

from Coriolanus, who had already enough to do to bear his own burden of declension.

If we observe closely, we cannot even find that the people are here represented as so very bad. We must distinguish between the way in which they really act and the way in which the mockers and despisers of the people represent them; we may then soon find that the populace in Julius Cæsar appear much worse than in Coriolanus. Great attention is here paid to the character of the age. In Antony, where the people had ceased to be of any importance, they no longer appear; in Cæsar, where their degeneracy ruined the republic, they are shown in all their weakness; in Coriolanus, where they can oppose but not stop the progress of Rome's political career, they appear equally endowed with good and bad qualities. We must allow that the populace are not flattered. The multitude are not alone blamed by Coriolanus as inconstant and variable, but they make him conscious of their changeableness by their behaviour concerning his election. Not alone does Menenius say that their imprudence 'transports them by calamity thither where more attends them,' but we find them actually on this road, and their leaders surpass them in popular frenzy; what is inconvenient is not believed and is concealed from the people, and the messenger is flogged who brings the unwelcome truth. It is true they are not alone reproached by words with unjustly ascribing to the government what is perhaps the decree of Providence, that they curse the justice that overtakes the criminal, and persecute the great with hatred; we see them ourselves in action, now loving and now hating without a reason, and, as it always happens in stirring times, scattering abroad the exciting commonplaces which have much show and little truth. Coriolanus despises all the deed and capacity of the people, which 'where it should find lions, finds hares,' but the poet has actually shown us their cowardice and their love of plunder. On the other hand, we must not be, like Coriolanus, unreasonable, and overlook the fact that Shakespeare has introduced some better and braver among the people, who, when the general calls for volunteers, all shout and follow him, to his great joy and admiration. We must not omit to observe that the whole mass of the people acknowledge the merit of Coriolanus, that the zeal to admire and applaud the conqueror is universal, that his party among the people seems very great, that even the inflamed and excited people acknow-

ledge that he is not avaricious, that he is not more proud than brave; that, with regard to his haughtiness, they take into consideration the power of his nature, and acknowledge that his merit surpasses their power to recompense. Menenius imagined that if the nobles did not keep them in awe they would destroy themselves, yet they acknowledge readily the wisdom of his fable, before which their wisdom yields. The friends of Coriolanus expected that the people, when left to themselves on his banishment, would fall into confusion, but, to their surprise, peace and union prevail. If fickleness be the attribute of the populace in all ages, there is an advantage even in this fault, which is totally opposed to the stiff obstinacy of the aristocrat; the populace become, through this quality, a manageable mass, which a wise man, like Menenius, can easily guide; if it be easily inflamed, it is also easily calmed again, and this quality of ready forgiveness Menenius himself praises in the people. Their hostility against Coriolanus is excusable on account of his indifference and haughty contempt, and on account of the scorn and enmity with which the proud man intentionally challenges their hatred.

Here, in fact, the good and bad qualities of the multitude are weighed truly, and even with moderation. If, however, we would find out the poet's estimation of democratic and aristocratic principles, we must, as we intimated above, compare the highest representative of both principles, Coriolanus, with Brutus and Cassius; not the populace with Coriolanus, who is intended by the poet, expressly and in accordance with history, to tower, like a hero, above them. We might compare this character with Marlowe's transcendent heroes, if Shakespeare's exaggeration were intended for genuine nature, and our admiration claimed in good faith, as is the case in similar descriptions of the old school of poetry; whereas with him, on the contrary, this outdoing of nature breaks to pieces of itself as something unnatural, and leaves in the observer a very mixed feeling. The poet has taken pains to make the exceptional pride and greatness of his hero *possible*. He has given him a mother glowing with patriotism, early left a widow, who has centred all her pride, her strength, and her love on making her only and early distinguished son the chief hero and ruler of his country. This Volumnia is a grand but not an attractive woman, who considers her masculine disposition as an honourable characteristic, and who says, had she been the wife of Hercules, she

would have undertaken six of his labours for him. She has 'like a hen clucked him to the wars;' if she had been his wife, she would 'freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour,' than at home where he 'would show most love;' she knows his wounds by heart, and, old as she is, she is enthusiastic in proudly imagining his warlike exploits and his return with 'bloody brows.' She tells him, with the utmost satisfaction, that no son has so much to thank his mother for as he has. Never had he been an hour out of her sight. She trained him in and for dangers and ambition; she taught him early that misfortune tries courage; had she a dozen sons, she would rather that 'eleven should die nobly for their country, than one voluptuously surfeit out of action.' She can boast that Coriolanus has 'sucked his valiantness from her,' and she looks with pride on the realisation of her boldest imaginings. This pride her son has inherited from her, although she denies it, and in a certain degree is justified in denying it. Hers was pride in her son; his, pride in himself; idolised by her, and by the friends of the family, Coriolanus' innate and cherished selfishness, through the delicate flattery of his well-meaning fosterer and friends, became great and aspiring haughtiness. Even his contempt for the people was first instilled into him by his mother; he was their enemy in his earliest youth, before he had ever come into collision with them. Volumnia educated her son in the conviction that man was 'no better than picture-like, if renown made it not stir;' in contrast to Antony, therefore, Coriolanus is instinctively brought up to the activity of public and military life; he

> rewards
> His deeds with doing them, and is content
> To spend the time to end it;

it seems to him a thing not to be thought of, that he would sit in the sun and have 'his head scratched' when the alarum was struck. He has been trained from childhood to an elevation above the ordinary and the vulgar; he has, says Volumnia, 'affected the fine strains of honour, to imitate the *graces of the gods*.' These overstrained demands on himself and others, springing from pride and begetting a greater pride, made him in time unfit for everything and ruinous to himself, because with them every good and every bad quality rose to a height that could not, as it were, support itself; he strove for a degree

of merit 'that stifled itself by its own excess.' No idle dream of honour impels him to seek for renown; he wishes *to be*, not to *seem*, the first. In this sense he is an aristocrat in the simplest and noblest meaning of the word; with him the name and the rank are nothing, but everything consistent with true pride lies in real merit. It would not satisfy him, like Cæsar, to be the first in the smallest place in the world, but rather to be the second in the greatest; he wishes to be, not the first in rank, but the greatest in deeds in the whole earth.

What induced Shakespeare to endow the hero of this play with this superhuman, demi-godlike greatness? History imposed upon the poet a catastrophe of the rarest kind. Coriolanus, after his banishment, fights against his country, for which, before, he would have striven in the hardest battles without requiring any reward; he enters into a league with his bitterest enemy from a cold, unfeeling thirst for vengeance; then, at the certain peril of his life, he suddenly abandons this revenge at the entreaty of his mother. These contradictions, Shakespeare thought, could only be imputed to a man who, from nature and education, had carried his virtues and his faults to extremes, which rendered natural the change of his different qualities into their opposites. This is managed with an art and a delicacy which can scarcely be suspected in the apparently coarse strokes of this delineation.

First, his unmeasured thirst for glory, which in an heroic age can only seek its satisfaction in the praise bestowed on the highest valour. If valour be 'the chiefest virtue,' it is said of him that he is then 'singly counterpoised in the world.' Coriolanus so considered valour. Nowhere is his whole being so over-excited as in battle; not his blows only, but his voice and his looks are dreadful. He suffers none to approach him in this point, unless it be old Titus Lartius, who, fighting on crutches, cannot hurt his glory. There is but one who rivals him in valour, Tullus Aufidius; towards him his ambition rises into envy. If he were 'anything but what he is,' Coriolanus would wish to be Aufidius. He confesses that he 'sins in envying his nobility.' He says:—

> Were half to half the world by the ears, and he
> Upon my party, I'd revolt, to make
> Only my wars with him!

In this declaration, how delicately is a very characteristic stain

cast on the valour of Coriolanus! He betrays by these words that his personal renown is of more value to him than his party, his cause, his country; he would fight as a hireling against Aufidius, no matter on which side! This is not the only point in which Coriolanus' thirst for glory appears in a doubtful light. We may observe it heroically rise to a really noble contempt of his adversary and of danger, and then again see it silently veiled, aimed with cold and artful calculation, not despising small means any more than great ones. Wounded, he meets Aufidius, he conceals his wounds in order to represent himself as fully equal to cope with him; the blood that masks him, he says, is Volscian blood, the blood of Aufidius' slain countrymen. Thus madly brave, he, the wounded man, stirs up the power and revenge of his strong enemy to the utmost. To this is added the other characteristic point, that in the campaign he ranks himself *below* Cominius, sure of renown, which always attends him, but clearly foreseeing that the errors that may be committed will be charged upon Cominius, and only tend to increase his glory.

Next to his military virtues we will examine his political qualities. That a man of his disposition and education must be an aristocrat on principle, if not so by birth, is very evident. He dislikes the representation of the people by the tribunate; he opposes every innovation which interferes with the sole rule of the senate; he is jealous against any concession as a proof of weakness, and as a wanton encouragement of rebellion; he is convinced that where two powers rule together, unless one has the upper hand, confusion will introduce discord between them, and one will overturn the other. But with these strict aristocratic principles he would have ruled like a wise statesman, if regard had been had to his nature and he had been left in peace. The poet has endowed him with that knowledge of state affairs and those high political views which seem peculiar to aristocratic bodies, in addition to the blamelessness of his private character. He possesses the first quality of a statesman—disinterestedness; even the populace allow that he is not greedy of gain; in the war he will not take a greater share of booty than any of the others. He would not distribute corn gratis among the rebellious crowd, but neither would he oppress the people; so long as he was not offended, he would be towards the people, as Menenius says, 'a bear that lives like a lamb.' He is, moreover, free from all petty and punishable

ambition. Dictatory as he is, he would never aim at tyrannical power; the scandal-loving tribunes themselves could not hope to have such a report of him as this believed. As he would not descend from the aristocratic sphere, so neither would he step beyond it. Jealous as he is of true honour and true pre-eminence, the posts of external honour are indifferent to him. He does not smooth the road to honour like those who flatter the people; he strives to advance the labours of actual merit. He does not covet the consulate, any more than the chief command of the army. But here prudence may be mixed with modesty, and modesty with pretension. He feels that he deserves the consulate, but he is not willing to use the usual means of suing for it; he will rather be the slave of the people in his own way than rule over them in theirs. But as, through the entreaties of his mother and his friends, he has once been induced to try for the consulate, he is bent upon obtaining it as a point of honour, as the reward of his deservings. If on these points his aristocratic feelings are free from egotism and a petty love of place, they are also free from petty conservatism, the usual principle of this class of politicians. He is not afraid of revolutions and cutting remedies, when in his wrath he has to pursue a party aim; but even in calmness and in the leisure of consideration he would not hesitate to apply 'a dangerous physic' against an infirmity of the state, which will cause death without it. He utters in the calmest manner the excellent maxim, adverse to the petty principles of conservatism:—

> What custom wills, in all things should we do't,
> The dust of antique time would lie unswept,
> And mountainous error be too highly heaped
> For truth to over-peer.

With such principles, Coriolanus would have been a distinguished statesman if he had employed the charm of his superiority to lead the people gently to goodness. Thus his mother teaches him. In war, she says, he is content to unite prudence and policy with honour, but he should also do so in peace. She can endure his absolute disposition, in which to her 'he can never be too noble;' but when extremities speak, 'when fortune and friends are at stake, he should tame his proud heart, and let the mouth only speak.' 'She has,' she says, 'a heart as little apt as his to be counselled, but yet a brain that leads her use of anger to better vantage.' This he should learn. He does,

indeed, indifferently understand it, under new conditions, when the unsociability of his nature has not yet brought him into difficulties, and when great aims make him prudent and discreet. When he has to propitiate the people of Antium he is at once loved and prized by them all. The senators stand bare-headed before him; Aufidius shares his power with him, and submits to his authority; the soldiers follow him in battle, as boys pursue butterflies; he is their god! But all these qualities suddenly disappear when he is angry, and when he experiences contradiction, especially from those whom he despises. When the people rebel in the famine he will heap up mountains of their bodies; when, at his election to the consulate, he has to suffer for his changeableness and the malice of the tribunes, he resents the peremptory *shall* of the popular leaders, while *his* absolute *will* never endured the smallest contradiction. Now he will violently rob the people of their votes, and he rises in rebellion against those whom he calls rebels; then he allows himself to call the people Hydra, cannibals, dogs, thus betraying his real feelings towards them, and justifying those harsh assertions of aristocratic obstinacy and blindness; that his party and station 'may disdain the people with cause, and the people, on the contrary, insult them without all reason.' All moderation and reasonableness, every wise judgment on the populace and mankind, every reflection that the state, in fact, only consists of the people, and that those through whom all the objects of the state must be worked out should not be lowered and degraded, but elevated, all the discretion and wisdom which make great public qualities only really great through the use made of them, all is entirely cancelled in the obstinate Coriolanus.

If Coriolanus' warlike ambition and aristocratic presumption of ruling were rooted in the great, proud, exaggerated claims which he makes on himself, in the high opinion he had of himself, and in the great merit which he knew he possessed, the passionateness by which he is hurried along was so likewise. Brought up with haughty manners, accustomed to no contradiction, he can endure none; yet he himself seeks his glory in contradiction. Those who in this way are spoiled by fortune, who appear everywhere as conquerors, who rule over all, are usually least able to rule themselves, and to be master of their fortune. To oppose Coriolanus is the way to irritate him; when thus irritated he cannot recover himself; when angry he

forgets 'that ever he heard the name of death;' when moved he 'will not spare to gird the gods, and to bemock the modest moon.' When the tribunes compass his ruin, they endeavour to rouse him to fury, and to make not only his tongue, but his heart speak. In the excellent scene of his banishment (Act III. sc. 3), the outbreak that they desired takes place in a great and violent degree. It is a master-stroke of character that Coriolanus, ever one and the same, always strained to the utmost even in his calmer moments, does not exaggerate anything in himself in this outbreak of fury, that his excitement cannot force any of his principles, any of his antipathies, beyond what they are; he can say that, were he 'as patient as the midnight sleep,' his opinions would be the same as he now utters in his rage. On the contrary, when his irritation and excitability are driven to the uttermost by his banishment, there follows the remarkable change from his vehemence into the opposite mood. He becomes then outwardly calm and still, whilst within him the dangerous resolves of his repressed anger ripen. While his mother in her feminine irritability gives vent to her hatred as long as the pain is new, 'Juno-like' in her anger, so that they say she is mad, while even the gentle Virgilia feels the sting of indignation, he behaves with cool composure; he gives his mother back her precepts; he tells her that

> fortune's blows
> When most struck home, being gentle wounded, craves
> A noble cunning.

Presently the mother grows calm, and makes a distinction between her country and the rabble, both of which he is striving to destroy together, nay, in the very moment of discomposure, she seems to dread the desperate resolve of Coriolanus from his apparent serenity; she begs him to take Cominius with him for a while. But he evades him and departs in silent wrath:—

> Like to a lonely dragon, that his fen
> Makes feared, and talked of more than seen.

Just as here his passion, when at its height, glides into apparent calmness, so his pride, the soul and centre of his character, subsides into apparent modesty. The ideas of highest honour implanted in him gave him betimes the greatest self-reliance; his valour and success raised this feeling to the

extremity of pride and haughtiness. 'Tickled with good success, such a nature disdains his own shadow;' must not Coriolanus despise all around him? When the nobles forsake him, and refuse to listen to his call to powerful resistance, his equals in rank are also obliged to hear his tone of contemptuous pride: they must 'vail their own ignorance' if the tribunes are to maintain their power; they are in that case plebeians, and the others senators. The people are certainly to feel his haughtiness much more strongly. He is not content with showing them his contempt, but he challenges their hatred; and even impartial persons distinctly perceive that he intentionally draws down upon himself the displeasure of the people as others flatter them for their love. The extremity of his pride is seen when he casts back upon his condemners the sentence of banishment, 'I banish you,' as if the one condemned weighed more than all the condemners in the world. And yet it may be asked whether this monstrous insolence indicates the actual pitch of Coriolanus' pride more than that modesty with which he contemns and rejects all reward, all praise, and all flattery. That his modesty has its origin partly in sincere endeavours after self-approval, and that, therefore, he will not have his mother's praise, although 'she has a charter to extol her blood,' this shows that his self-reliance is noble in principle and his pride justified in a great degree by his merits and his actions. Nevertheless, this feature bears also the stamp of excessive pride; there is mixed up with it that highest arrogance which thinks itself superior to all praise, with which he avoids all acclamation and every laudatory report, with which the man begs not to hear 'his nothings monstered,' while he believed as much as any in the gigantic greatness of his importance.

This peculiarity in Coriolanus of being unable to listen to flattery is connected with another, that of being still less able to express it. He is true and plain; he has been 'bred i' the wars, and is ill schooled in boulted language;' 'meal and bran together he throws out without distinction;' he speaks the truth in spite of every danger; he can also listen to the truth, if it be without degradation and abuse; what he thinks, he utters, and what he says, he does; promise-breakers are hateful to him. He strives, therefore, to avoid applying for the consulship in the customary manner by humbly suing the people; he would not, they say, 'flatter Neptune for his trident,' how then should he

flatter the people! And when the entreaties of his family and friends have induced him to play this unnatural part, he wears the 'humble weeds with a proud heart,' apes mockingly the popular arts, and tells the citizens that he received his wounds when 'their brethren roared and ran away.' When his mother, afterwards, with her powerful entreaties and representations, persuades him again to act the part of prudent dissimulation, the suppressed rage in his heart bursts forth at once in spite of all his solemn promises and resolutions. And yet afterwards among the Antiates, when his plans of revenge and wrath against the Romans demand it, this extraordinary man can suddenly use the arts he never would condescend to employ; he can do violence to his nature, flatter the furtherers of his plans, and act towards his enemies out of thirst for vengeance as he never could towards his friends out of public-spiritedness and patriotism.

The untractableness of his disposition, the inflexibility of his character, and the stubbornness of his will, which display themselves in his proud demeanour, are, like this pride itself, partly founded in his nature and partly in the principles of his exaggerated aspirations. Seriousness, severity, unsociableness we must acknowledge to be in his disposition; the people themselves and Aufidius excuse much of his pride on account of the unconquerable power of his natural disposition. The habits of the soldier helped to condense these qualities into a rigid, repelling unapproachableness; Aufidius says of his nature that he could not move 'from the casque to the cushion,' that he was 'no other than one thing,' one-sided and obstinate, as Plutarch also characterises him. The gloomy and never sociable man had never even shown friendliness to his mother; he slights his nearest friends, not merely when he is the ally of Aufidius; even before this time he accepts their idolatry coolly, and joins them without having much consideration for them, only honouring himself, hardened by the selfishness of talent and the pride of merit. Plutarch says of him, that he had become so morose and intolerant that he would yield to no living creature, which made him unfit for intercourse with anyone; a rigid man by nature, who never gave way on any pretence, as if to lord it over everyone and to submit to none were a proof of manliness, and not rather of sickly weakness; as if to force through everything, and to have the upper hand everywhere, were a sign of magnanimity. Shakespeare had this

idea perfectly in his mind. In the last sentence it is intimated, as Shakespeare has closely observed and carried out, that Coriolanus had cultivated these natural dispositions even on principle from the feeling of self-sufficiency. To tower above all in acts, in power, and in unbending will, to appear, as was said of him, like an oak, like a rock, to be shaken by no wind, is evidently the most significant mark of his aspiring pride. He could not have comprehended the lesson which Plutarch extracts from his example, that the Muse has imparted nothing finer to mankind than the taming of nature by moderation and wisdom; he could thus have no idea of the mitigation of manners by education, and not even of giving way to the softer emotions of his own nature; he would have been afraid of betraying a weakness unbecoming his manhood. When these notions of proud, manly heroism are put to the highest trial, they find also their boldest expression. When mother, wife, and son stand up between him and his revenge, and 'great nature cries *Deny not*,' he prepares with a shudder to do the last violence to nature; 'Out affection!' he exclaims—

> All bond and privilege of nature, break!
> Let it be virtuous to be obstinate.—
> . . . . . Let the Volsces
> Plough Rome, and harrow Italy; I'll never
> Be such a gosling to obey instinct; but stand
> As if a man were author of himself,
> And knew no other kin.

His proud self-will drives him to the assumption of a god-like power of self-determination, staking his will against every natural impulse and feeling. But under this violent strain nature gives way; stifled instinct revenges itself, and while abjuring all natural emotions he feels he is not of stronger earth than other men. And the man who made it his pride to outdo humanity pleases us best when he condescends to be human.

This change does not take place in him by virtue of an arbitrary machinery. We may, on other occasions also, observe in him the traces of this suppressed humanity, and on these occasions we like him best. The son is said to be altogether like his father; we may, therefore, apply to him the incident related of the boy: how 'he ran after a butterfly, and when he caught it, he let it go again; then after it again, and over and

over he comes, and up again; catched it again, and tore it to pieces.' Seldom is so much said in a short example. It exactly justifies Menenius' description of Coriolanus, 'a bear that lives like a lamb,' good-hearted when quiet, when excited, furious. Shakespeare did not omit to copy from Plutarch the anecdote (Act I. sc. 9) of his meeting in Corioli with one who had formerly shown him hospitality, and begging for his freedom, though in the fury of the battle he had not minded him; it testifies to the same sort of character. We would not, as others have done, call these mere fits of feeling in a god of stone, and deny to Coriolanus any enduring feeling; these features betray a fund of real good-nature in his character, and a share of the inalienable requirements of the heart, which in his overstrained notions of noble manhood he has only attempted to extinguish. This is seen in his domestic affections, the last vulnerable spot in the horny hide of his selfishness. Like Othello he is attached to a wife, whom from her very intercourse (Valeria) we know to be domestic, not remarkably intellectual, not to be seduced from her work, silent, reserved, but of the utmost feminine sweetness. The poet has given her a quiet but powerful influence over Coriolanus; to her alone he is gentle and tender; 'my gracious silence' he calls her when she greets his triumph with tears; and when she comes with Volumnia to petition against the siege of Rome, he is first moved by 'those doves' eyes, which can make gods forsworn,' and he addresses her in words of real feeling. Filial piety goes hand in hand with this conjugal love. It is said among the people that his love for his mother is equal to his pride, and that both are dearer to him than his country. According to a practice already familiar to us, the poet has prepared us for the decisive scene, where maternal influence prevails, by an example preceding it, so that one may explain the other. He shows her to us first persuading him to present himself repentant before the tribunes. This is a harder task than the later one, where she attunes him to human feeling, whereas here she impels him to act contrary to his nature, to renounce his intention, to humble his spirit. He agrees to do what she asks for her sake, but for his own he would rather be ground to dust than do it; he paints the scene in self-despising language; overcome with shame he recalls his promise, but his mother pledges her honour for its performance. 'To beg of thee,' she says, 'it is more my dishonour than thou of them;' this compels him to make the

effort, which fails. The skill displayed in this scene is as great as in the subsequent one, the real task which history placed before the poet. After the first proof of Volumnia's power over her son it is easy to comprehend the second. In the first the consulship only was in question, here the fate of Rome; there his outward honour, here his true glory; if he overthrows Rome, his mother tells him, his name will be 'dogged with curses,' and the chronicle will add:—

> The man was noble,
> But with his last attempt he wip'd it out,
> . . . . . His name remains
> To the ensuing age, abhorred.

On the first occasion she pledged her honour; here, with Virgilia, she pledges her life: he shall not assault his country without treading on their bodies. There the mother's ambition spoke, here her love for her country, which outweighs even the enthusiastic love of the mother; she rises to a magnanimous heroism on the grand occasion which restores to *him* his human feelings. The appearance of his friend Menenius had given Coriolanus the first shock. The sight of his mother on her knees before him shows him how unnatural is his position towards his country. His boy's droll remark completes the shock; his own blood threatens to rise up against him in defence of his country.

We will take one more comprehensive retrospect. The mother had instilled into Coriolanus his bravery and desire of glory; these had led to pride; his pride had grown to excess, to a more than human strength of will and action. But the extreme in his nature, we have said, passed everywhere over into its opposite, his honourable bravery into a jealousy that took away the honourable aim which his deeds should ever have had; his valuable political gifts were put to the most hurtful use; his fury and passion were changed into forced calmness, pride into modesty, truth and uprightness into dissimulation, unbending rigidity into softness of feeling and even fickleness. Coriolanus enters the house of Aufidius with reflections on the changes of the world; how friendship breaks out into enmity for a doit, and hatred into friendship for some trick not worth an egg; so is it with him, he says himself, with him who had always so deeply despised the populace for their fickleness! On two great occasions in his history we see him fall from want of self-

government, from overstrained passion and irritability, once on the occasion of his banishment, and again at his death. On both occasions a single word, the opprobrious epithet of traitor, brings on the fatal outbreak of his fury. This shows in a very remarkable manner the fine turning-point by which he missed the result of all his strivings. If this name were rightly bestowed on him, then no reproach could be thought of which would so immediately shatter the noble work of Volumnia, and overturn the object of all the proud endeavours of Coriolanus as this. If he were a traitor, then his glory was turned into shame, his bravery misapplied, his pride dishonoured, his civic virtue changed into selfishness, his truth and fidelity into their reverse, his most honourable efforts covered with the coarsest stains. And it cannot be denied that he became a traitor to Rome after he first heard this word of reproach, and he was one to the Antiates when he heard it the second time. This mother, the giver and the shaper of his life, had brought him into both situations; she, therefore, meets her punishment with him. The first time, in a movement of motherly weakness, she had tempted him, contrary to a right instinct, into a false path, and thereby drawn down upon him the unmerited reproach of being a traitor, which he then hastened to deserve; this fault she and he also repaired, when, in a noble spirit of patriotism, she allured him back from his mistaken search after vengeance into the path of humanity, which he trod with death before his eyes. The name of traitor suits him now, indeed, but rather to his glory than to his disgrace, and his death atones for his life.

We perceive, from the treatment of this character, that the poet elaborated it not so much with love as with great interest; it is not exactly a pleasant, but a powerful impression which we carry away from the consideration of the play and of the character, which in fact fills up the whole of it. To explain this we must remember that, not only earlier, but at that time, Shakespeare's warmest sympathies rested on that unobtrusive greatness and on that plain, unexaggerated nature which he has depicted in Prince Henry and in Posthumus. As he had before contrasted his Percy with this form of character, he now did the same with Coriolanus, but far more remotely. And we may imagine that just this sharp contrast and its representation must have had a great charm for the poet, who with the most unbiassed mind perceived and acknowledged the peculiar alloy

in every great character. But what a large and comprehensive mind is this, that with so much love now sketches the characters of a Brutus and a Posthumus, their severe virtue and calm composure; then represents the expressive pride of this hero, Coriolanus, in the most accurate and full development of a heart that discloses little; and then, again, contrasts with this overstrained nature the weak characters of Antony and Timon, which lie in quite a different sphere, and which again he described with such mastery and penetration as might seem to betray in the poet himself a preference for these forms of human nature.

A few words must suffice to show the contrasts in which the other personages of the play stand towards this chief colossal figure.

His adversary, Tullus Aufidius, emulates him in the strife for superiority, but it is in him of a far less noble kind. He abhors nothing so much as Coriolanus' glory; as he is forced to yield to him in every encounter, he gives up the hope of conquering with the same weapons; his emulation loses its honourable character; he is ready to use any means to ruin Coriolanus:—

> Nor sleep, nor sanctuary,
> Being naked, sick: nor fane, nor capitol,
> The prayers of priests, nor times of sacrifice

shall protect him. A like selfishness to that of Coriolanus appears here, but in a petty and degraded form. The fit of magnanimity in Tullus, when Coriolanus claims his hospitality, is a counterpart to the softer emotions of the Roman; but the vow that he will now contend with him in love, as he did before in hate, is worthless. His renouncing a share of his power to the new general is a similar trait to Coriolanus' indifference to posts of honour; but as in the latter the claim to merited honours slumbers beneath his modesty, in Aufidius regret and longing for the recovery of the honour he had possessed soon break out, and with them the old rivalry. He possesses the art of patient dissimulation, which Volumnia in vain wished for in her son; he is, therefore, a dangerous friend for the man who cannot even tame his pride before his benefactor. Coriolanus consequently falls a sacrifice to Tullus' unworthy stratagem. The Volscian is irritated against Coriolanus because of his defeat, as Coriolanus is against Rome by his banishment; the

courage and disposition of both are poisoned, but the prevailing difference, which raises Coriolanus high above the other, is that *he* is of a nobler nature, that in his bitterness of feeling he is seized by an unnatural enmity against his country, but he returns to his better nature; whereas Tullus is naturally malicious, and is flattered by the need of his enemy thus fleeing to him for protection; he forms an unnatural friendship with him, and then returns to his deceitful spite in the conspiracy against Coriolanus.

The Roman enemies and friends of Coriolanus present other contrasts. Cominius appears as the modest man opposed to the proud one, as a character unenvying and free from ambition contrasted to that thirsting for fame, as one who readily acknowledges the worth of the other, and cheerfully gives way to his superior merits. The tribunes, in their mean, intolerant, strutting pride of office, are striking contrasts to his grand pride of action. As upstarts they set up as high pretensions as Coriolanus without his capacity; they are as violent and obstinate as *he* is without his merit; they show themselves in the settling of small matters as impatient and violent as he does in great things and from great motives; they place their petty ambition on the obeisance of the populace, whilst their eyes could not even reach to the height of his ambitious projects; opposed to his valour is their unwarlike disposition; opposed to his openness and straightforwardness are their dexterous intrigues, and their lying in wait for the expression of his pride and fury, which will be his ruin; opposed to his bold abuse of the people is the aptness with which they lead the populace as they please, and know how to keep themselves free from blame.

The most striking personage next to Coriolanus is Menenius Agrippa. Except the well-known fable of the belly and the members, Shakespeare found nothing further concerning him in his English Plutarch than the remark that he was the pleasantest old man in the senate. From this hint he has formed the lively character, to whom he awards the benevolent office, beside the rugged demi-god, of being contented to be a man amongst men. In all his individual qualities this contrast is carried out, although it seems as if unintentional. He has none of Coriolanus' thirst for fame; he rather rejoices in the fame of his friend; he idolises him, and 'it gives him an estate of seven years' health' when Coriolanus condescends to write to

him; he calls himself 'the book of his good acts, whence men have read his fame unparalleled, haply amplified.' Even with the will to speak the truth of his hero he involuntarily oversteps its bounds. It is easy to him to be his unselfish admirer, because his own talents lie in quite another direction. Age has broken his warlike strength, though his brave mind still looks out here and there, when in extremity he calls the nobles to help Coriolanus, and says he could himself 'take up a brace of the best of the plebeians.' But his true strength lies rather in mental superiority; his excellence is that of a clever orator. Shakespeare has given him the propitiatory office of a mediator, in contrast to Coriolanus' blunt party spirit, but he has wisely avoided giving him any power to act, because that would have thrown Coriolanus too much into the shade. Instead of energy and wisdom, he has given him zeal, and the experience belonging to age, figurative oratory, and prudent wholesome sense; his wit and skill in persuasion he mostly uses with those who have none of their own. He is as expert in the office of mediator as Coriolanus is inexpert. He is the satyr in contrast to the god. Instead of making lofty pretensions, he has a respect for human weakness; compared with that overstrained nature he is indolent and easy, and where the other is rigid and unbending, Menenius is yielding, good-humoured, sociable, and friendly; instead of gloomy seriousness, he indulges in a broad, pleasant humour. He is a good sleeper, he likes his wine unmixed; behind his back they say of him that he is 'something imperfect in favouring the first complaint.' There is not in him a vein of Coriolanus' pride, only a little conceit in his gift of speaking, which seldom fails to succeed with the people, and which, in a case of extreme difficulty, he hopes to turn to good account with Coriolanus; and his vanity feels itself wounded when the shallow tribunes think they 'know' him because he is open and honest. If his pride is little compared to the overgrown haughtiness of Coriolanus, Menenius' passionateness is in the same proportion. He can be hasty, and rage out with the good-nature of choleric old age and on trifling occasions; but in great matters, where Coriolanus loses his temper, he is patient, calm, full of the greatest discretion, and perfectly master of himself. He scarcely yields to Coriolanus in uprightness and truth, but he expresses himself in a smooth manner, and people endure his satire, when it is as sharply and contemptuously uttered as in his fable, better than Coriolanus'

boasting and arrogance. On a proper occasion he does not mind reviling the tribunes for their likeness to asses, and saying that their eloquence is 'not worth the wagging of their beards;' but another time he can patiently endure that they should be called honourable persons. With these qualities he is a born mediator. He wishes at any cost to avoid a breach between the nobles and the people. When Coriolanus urges the annulling of the tribunate he speaks for its preservation; he makes the concessions to which the other objected as weak and impolitic. When the tribunes and Coriolanus press for violent remedies for the 'violent disease' he would patch up the mischief 'with cloth of any colour;' when they interfere with his art of smoothing and settling he does not lose his patience. He manages the furious Coriolanus according to his nature, sparing while he blames him, cursing his unkindness, and excusing and praising him in a breath. With Coriolanus he takes the part of the people, on account of their placability, and with the people, that of Coriolanus. He helps Volumnia to soften the rigid man, he acts honourably as his advocate with the people, and says for him all that *he* ought to have said for himself; and after the happy results of his oratory, which the poet exhibits at the beginning according to history, he gives a second instance of the way to manage the people properly without any prejudicial concession. When Coriolanus is banished he is civil and pliant towards the tribunes; when the exile advances towards Rome he is maliciously cheerful, and in return for this he has to suffer the malice of the Volscian guards when his eloquence has failed to persuade Coriolanus. In these last scenes the weaknesses of old age show themselves more plainly, and in the midst of them his nobler nature appears more distinctly. This is excellently depicted, and will give the actor enough to do. The struggle in Coriolanus between proud indifference and a heart breaking under the effect of his friends' first entreaties, in Menenius between confidence and renewed disappointment, and beneath the cloak of playfulness the inward struggle between friend and country, and the resolve of the cheerful old man to end like a Roman,—these are contrasts and contradictions which it requires the utmost art to reconcile.

Shakespeare has followed Plutarch as faithfully in Coriolanus as in Cæsar and Antony. The character was handed down to him just as he has copied it. In his address to Tullus, when he

applies to him for refuge, and in his speech to Volumnia, the passages from Plutarch are only as it were transformed into verse. The poet even retains all the faults of the historian. Plutarch makes Coriolanus canvass the people for the consulship, although the senate, at that time, chose both the consuls. The poet also suffered himself to be led into other mistakes by Plutarch of which the biographer was innocent. Plutarch says of Coriolanus, he was a soldier, even to Cato's wish; Shakespeare makes Titus Lartius utter this expression, as if Cato had lived before his time. The poet has likewise alluded to Galen and to the Roman theatres in this piece, just as in Lear he mentioned Nero and the Bethlem-beggars 800 years before Christ; in Henry VI., Machiavelli; in Hamlet, Wittenberg; in Troilus, the wrestler Milo and Aristotle; in the Winter's Tale, the oracle of Delphi contemporary with Julio Romano. We have already intimated that we must not attribute the anachronisms altogether to Shakespeare's ignorance. Not that we should deny the possibility of his ignorance in some cases. He must have known the time when Cato lived, from Plutarch's Cæsar. But it is possible that as he found several republican Brutuses, so he may have concluded there were several severe Catos. It is certain that he was not so early schooled in Eutropius as we are, nor had he any chronological dictionary to refer to in order to set himself right in his dates. Nevertheless, we ought to consider how valuable to the poet was the brevity and suggestiveness of such an intimation as he puts in the mouth of Titus Lartius; it is doubtful whether, if the mistake had been pointed out to him, he would have corrected it, seeing it was so serviceable; nay, it is doubtful whether it was a mistake at all, and not rather a license like Goethe's when he made Faust mention Luther. There is a passage in Lear which ought to make us cautious—a passage where the *observance* of chronology constitutes a much greater license than the *neglect* of it to which we have alluded—a passage which looks like a capital stroke of satire addressed to all self-opiniated and pedantic censors (a set of people not lacking even at the poet's time); the passage where the poet says, 'This prophecy Merlin shall make; *for I live before his time.*'

TIMON OF ATHENS.

We have no more certain indication of the date of Timon of Athens than of Coriolanus, but it is without doubt one of the poet's latest works. It is probable that it was written not long after Antony and Cleopatra, since there is a passage in Plutarch's life of Antony which may have given the poet the idea of this work. After the battle of Actium, Antony retired for a while from Alexandria, and dwelt alone on the sea-shore, resolved, as he said, to imitate Timon, since he, like him, had experienced the ingratitude and infidelity of friends, and therefore hated and mistrusted all men. To this intimation is annexed a short account of Timon, his friendly relations with Alcibiades, his intercourse with Apemantus, his fig-tree, and two inscriptions upon him. What other materials the poet may have had besides these scanty suggestions we know not with any certainty. Painter's collection of tales (Palace of Pleasure), with which he was acquainted, contributed somewhat (I. 28). Probably the subject had been already dramatically treated. A very stupid play about Timon has been preserved and published by Dyce in the writings of the Shakespeare Society; but Shakespeare could have made little or no use of it. Still he may have seen it, and borrowed some passages, such as the idea of the farewell banquet and the character of the faithful steward. We may infer that he was indirectly acquainted with Lucian's Timon; the digging up of the gold, the parasites' pursuit of him, and his driving them away with stones and blows, the portioning off his servant, and even some resemblance in the imagery and speeches, leave scarcely any doubt of this. But the use of Roman names seems to prove that he did not borrow directly from Lucian, as Shakespeare would in that case have avoided them.

The impression made on most readers by Timon is that of great inequality. The versification is loose, and either un-

usually irregular or corrupted. Some portions of the piece are worked out with love, others appear to have been most carelessly treated. The many indifferent personages with no distinctly marked characters make the scenes here and there disconnected. The intensity and depth of feeling with which the subject, as a whole, is carried out cannot be denied; but compared with this earnestness, the burlesque scenes, where the borrowing servants of Timon are turned off, are too sharply contrasted. The composition is arranged with the old attention to unity of idea, but in some points it is loose and, as it were, unfinished. With the story of Timon there is united a second action between Alcibiades and the senate. This is carried on in exact parallel, and in the same sense as the main action; but it does not hang well together in all its parts. In Act v. sc. 3 it is intimated that Alcibiades has undertaken the war against Athens partly on Timon's account, but nothing further is said of this in the play. The reason of his rebellion is given in Act III. sc. 5. He there pleads in vain for a friend who has been condemned to death for killing a man in a duel. The poet handles with his usual triumphant impartiality the question of duelling, and places the views of justice, order, and age in opposition to those of honour, passion, and youth, with the same decided indecision as that in which he has left the question of self-murder an open matter. But the discussion concerns some one entirely unknown; we learn nothing whatever of the man's person or home. Singularly enough, all commentators pass over this circumstance without remark, although no similar disconnected scene is to be found in the whole of Shakespeare. How these irregularities are to be accounted for is a matter of dispute. Coleridge thought that the original text of Shakespeare had been spoiled by actors. Knight considered the piece to be a revision of an older play, of which portions only were retained, so that Timon was to be looked upon as a companion piece to Pericles. Delius regards the play as an unfinished work, the outlines of which were left incomplete for representation. We, on our side, however, content ourselves with the opinion we expressed in our remarks upon Antony, where we attributed the carelessness in a number of plays of this date to one common, though unfathomable, cause—the state of the poet's mind. We must, however, add that some of the peculiarities in this or other works of the same date may arise also from the subject itself. Timon is a play

with scarcely any real story. Shakespeare was led in his judicious manner by two mere hints to display the relation of Timon to Alcibiades and Apemantus; nevertheless, we can easily imagine that among these ancient materials, where he did not feel himself quite at home, he would not hazard too much in his inventions, that he would be timorous in the creation of entirely new persons, and that hence we may explain the many nameless figures which here, as in Antony and Coriolanus, are sometimes obliged to carry on the action.

With what caution we strive to discuss these and the like questions in Shakespeare's works we will prove by an expression of Coleridge's which has direct reference to the intrinsic matter of this play. His admiration of separate portions of this bitter satire was boundless; but he considered the work on the whole as a painful and disagreeable conception, because it presented an unfavourable picture of human nature, very different from what he was convinced was the poet's real opinion of the character of his fellow-creatures. He imagined, therefore, that he had taken up the subject under a temporary feeling of vexation and disappointment. This idea corresponds exactly with our view of the plays of this period. But we have already warned our readers in Antony not to attribute to the poet that which necessarily results from the matter. The subject itself is misanthropy as a consequence of human wickedness. Perhaps the *choice* of such a subject indicates a mind out of tune; but we find no traces of it in *the carrying out* of the plan when once formed. We should be more disposed to fear that in Antony Shakespeare had judged the baseness of his hero too leniently than that here he had too strongly condemned the baseness of mankind in general. There, indeed, we see no better specimens of humanity, but here they are not all thoroughly unfavourable. Timon's love for mankind at the beginning, as well as his hatred of them later, is so mixed up with noble qualities that the most beneficial effects result from both. When his fortune crumbles away and his friends forsake him, his servants, though they have nothing more to hope from him, yet, having become acquainted with him in the days of his philanthropy, cling to him with sympathy; they are scattered, but determine to remain 'fellows still,' and the faithful comrades meet and share their money, so that at the same time the curse of misanthropy and the blessing of philanthropy proceed from this house. When Timon afterwards in his retreat digs

up a fresh treasure, and being beset with thieves for the sake of the money, describes to them, with the exaggeration of hatred, all the elements and heavenly bodies as thieves, curses them and wishes them success at the same time, bids them 'love not themselves, but rob one another,' since they can steal nothing, 'but thieves do lose it,' this frenzy fills one of the thieves with such remorse that he is inclined to relinquish his 'profession.' Even Timon's misanthropy scatters good seed and brings forth moderation out of excess. To these individual features, which compensate for the unfavourable representation of humanity, we may add the declarations of the servants of those usurers and of Timon's creditors, who are ashamed of their masters and their commissions; the poet seems everywhere to have wished to show a grain of incorruption in the lower classes, which was wholly stifled in the upper. The perfection of this contrast is the faithful steward, who manages Timon's affairs with honesty, strives with fidelity and prudence to rein in his prodigality, and patiently, with silent sorrow, bears to be blamed and refused a hearing. Timon's goodness attaches this servant to him so strongly that at last, in his poverty, he is ready to share his last penny with his master, and thereby revives a spark of human kindness in the hardened heart of the sworn misanthrope. The comforting assurance that no good seed is ever lost, even though it may spring up as a weed, is expressed in all these contrasts, which, it seems to us, are full of compensation for the melancholy purport of this tragedy, betraying in the poet an abundance of inward tenderness and an unshaken discretion and certainty in his view of the arrangements of Providence, which so often seem perplexed and cause perplexity in us.

Shakespeare characterises the intention of his drama at the very beginning, where he makes the poet describe his poem to Timon. 'I have,' he says,

> in this rough work, shaped out a man,
> Whom this beneath world doth embrace and hug
> With amplest entertainment . . . . . .
> I have upon a high and pleasant hill,
> Feigned Fortune to be thron'd: The base o' the mount
> Is ranked with all deserts, all kinds of natures,
> That labour on the bosom of this sphere
> To propagate their states: amongst them all,
> One do I personate of Lord Timon's frame,
> Whom Fortune with her ivory hand wafts to her;

Whose present grace to present slaves and servants
Translates his rivals. . . . . .
All those which were his fellows but of late,
Follow his strides, his lobbies fill with tendance,
Rain sacrificial whisperings in his ear,
And make sacred even his stirrup. . . . .
When Fortune,
Spurns down her late beloved, all his dependants,
Which laboured after him to the mountain's top,
. . . . . let him slip down,
Not one accompanying his declining foot.

The way in which Shakespeare has produced this picture from the scanty anecdotes of Plutarch is not less astonishing than the similar one in the closely allied story of the Merchant of Venice. Here as there the poet shows the omnipotence of gold. There, among the different effects which this touchstone of the heart produces in different men, he has shown us the usurer hardened to stone by avarice and greed; here on the contrary he depicts the prodigal, whose fault on his change of fortune so poisons the innate goodness of his heart that he becomes as hardened in disposition as the other was miserly. The two plays, viewed in connection, express more plainly than apart the truth which Shakespeare so often picturesquely and eloquently instilled, that all extremes are hurtful. Timon's unjust censurer makes him the one just reproach, that he had never known 'the middle of humanity' but only 'the extremity of both ends;' his chief fault is that he does too much good; his prodigality is not greater than the superabundance of his love and beneficence, and when these are repaid with ingratitude, they are turned into an excess of misanthropy; in each case there is an entire absence of discrimination, examination, choice, and exception among the objects of his benefits, his love, and his hatred. This eccentricity of character is natural to the prodigal; a certain shallowness of mind will be always inseparable from this quality when it governs a man; whether Shakespeare besides this quality could have given to his Timon the depth of a true tragic character, which may force from us a serious interest in his person and in his fate, is a question on the answer to which our estimation of the play will essentially depend. Goethe said he could call Molière's 'Misanthrope' tragic, whereas Shakespeare's Timon was only a subject for comedy. It may be asked whether this is one of Goethe's frequent whims about Shakespeare, or whether it is an opinion arising from correct observation.

The displays of Timon's prodigality certainly in themselves touch us but superficially. We see this man in his hall of audience, like a prince, surrounded by characters and minds of all classes and conditions; the smooth and slippery as well as the serious and honest do homage to *him*, the flatterer and censor by profession; near and intimate friends surround him; professors and artists are among his acquaintance; the state is indebted to him for military service, the senate as a body and as individuals owe him money. We see at once what collects this crowd. A courteous porter stands at his door, who invites every passer-by to enter; within a costly banquet is prepared, with delicacies to suit every taste, to which even the beggar Apemantus is welcome if he chooses; the guests receive, besides the repast, valuable presents of horses and jewels; it is true they also offer gifts to Timon, but these are only to excite his lavishness; he gives sevenfold the value of what he receives beyond all customary recompense. He gives, however, without reflecting on his means, and without considering the characters of the recipients; once indeed he endows an honourable dependant and advances a good man, but he promotes just as willingly a bad one; he gives jewels that are unpaid for to people who tease him for arrears; a true friend in need, he helps his friend out of prison, and excuses the five borrowed talents when the borrower had become a great heir, and this man afterwards refuses, in his benefactor's need, even to *lend* the *gift* to him. To make presents and to give have become a habit of his royal disposition; 'he could,' he says, 'deal kingdoms to his friends, and ne'er be weary.' When his steward warns him he will not listen, when he urges he sends him away; 'his promises fly so beyond his state' that he gives great gifts out of an empty coffer, 'what he speaks is all in debt, he owes for every word.' This thoughtless generosity seems to the good steward, when in sad amazement he looks into Timon's heart, to be 'a monument and wonder of good deeds evilly bestowed;' he laments that 'the bounty that makes gods does still mar men;' when he looks upon the matter reasonably, he cannot but blame it as senseless that this man will neither know how to maintain the expense nor to leave it off; 'that he will not hear till he feel.' The folly of this wilful blindness increases, when we see how every warning is disregarded, under whatever form it may present itself. His parasitical poet presents it to him in the garb of flattery;

Timon pays no attention: Apemantus expresses it in a blunt exaggerated manner, this he calls 'railing on society;' the steward gives it him by his accounts, these he will not look at. Even when his creditors force the subject upon him, the steward can only obtain a hearing by speaking with tears to Timon's heart which is never closed, and by seeking a striking word to touch his spirit with sudden truth :—

> The world is but a word;
> Were it all yours to give it in a breath,
> How quickly were it gone!

Even then it is tedious to Timon that he should 'sermon' him; he is not accustomed to listen to disagreeable truths; the delicate poison of flattery has spoiled him. A man of such refined habits as he is would not be pleased with coarse flattery to his face any more than Antony; he can listen to the reproaches of Apemantus without turning him out as a troublesome guest: when the jeweller utters an extravagant compliment, he rejects it as mockery; from his guests he requires that they should lay aside all ceremony; he will have them as friends, and not as people of 'faint deeds and hollow welcomes,' for whom 'ceremony was devised at first.' They, indeed, prove themselves by their ready submission to be no other than such people, and their society and the gradual habit of their tone have given Timon something of the same shallowness. On his first appearance he is quite the spoiled favourite of an effeminate and immoral city; a Mæcenas, if not a prince in his deportment, noble, condescending, full of amiable consideration, refined in speech, brief, plain, select, but never deep. Amid the charms of cheerful society and the habits of enjoyment his mind is lowered and his consideration wasted, like Antony's. No lofty calling summons him to action, as is the case with Antony; his military services to Athens are considered as an excess of merit not required in a man of his quality and in a private station. But even within his private sphere we nowhere see, at first, any trace of deep intellectual culture; he takes a superficial interest in the arts; there is little wit in his ordering of his feasts either in his friendly or in his misanthropical mood; he is an amiable, ordinary mortal and man of the world, who lives for the present moment; when misfortune approaches he does not reflect on his own fault, but makes human nature the object of his deepest hatred; his mind offers

no refuge into which he may retire; he sinks, unresistingly, from one extreme to the other. Still it is not to be denied that trouble in him, as in Richard II., discovers depth of feeling and of spirit which had not been guessed at before. A man of inaction, not naturally and by birth like Antonio (the Merchant of Venice), but by the habit of a life of ease, he has allowed his intellectual as well as his mental qualities to slumber. He was as unwilling to be the slave of his wealth as the other; but Antonio, at once frugal and generous, did not seek for the liberal use of his wealth any more than for his one tried friend; Timon on the contrary sent out his money before him, and wanted it to do all for him, all that it could do best and could do least; in his misfortunes he made use of it to send evil into the world he hated; in his prosperity to buy him friends, the greatest need of his nature, while it could only buy flatterers for him. To gain friends by intellectual qualities and endowments, to choose disinterested friends, he did not understand. But what makes amends for this is that he chose them with his heart, and that he gained them as much by his affectionate nature as by his liberality. If, up to this point, Timon appears to be a very superficial character, fit only for an ordinary domestic play of a trivial character, Shakespeare has at this finest place given him all the depth which makes him belong to the higher world of poetry. This depth lies in the close connection between Timon's liberal hand and his heart. The ancients used to unite the ideas of external and intrinsic liberality; in the middle ages the word '*Milde*' in German (mildness) combined the idea of philanthropy, liberality, and beneficence as if these were inseparable qualities, as indeed they will always prove if but one of them is unfeigned and undissembled. With 'mildness' in this sense the inconceivable acuteness of Shakespeare's knowledge of mankind has endowed Timon. His wealth is throughout that of a good and noble disposition. Lavish of love, of untiring and ceaseless kindness, lavish of confidence even to credulity, lavish in his outward manners even to the most friendly sociability with the meanest persons, he is at the same time lavish of his money; he is a prodigal with his heart as well as with his fortune; he is the very soul of human kindness, of unassuming and attractive manners, and with regard to his possessions he is disinterested, self-sacrificing, and unselfish to a fault. For he allows the sun of his liberality and kindness to shine upon the evil and the

good; in the midst of the most corrupted city he retains the most unsuspecting faith in mankind; when misfortune overtakes him he has the consciousness that he has been urged by mean prodigality, that he had given imprudently and not unworthily. Even his enemies call honesty his fault; the honest faithful servants of this rich household do honour to the master as well as to themselves. Though some vanity and ostentation may have insinuated themselves into Timon's benevolence, yet he gave and helped from principle and a sense of duty; 'we are born,' he said, 'to do benefits.' Though flattery may have blunted his powers of discrimination, yet he sought not flatterers by his liberality, but true friends, and he thought he possessed true friends. He placed the social virtues of kindness and friendship at the summit of his ideal, and would with Aristotle have pronounced that man foolish who could call a hermit happy; but he overlooked the fact that real friendship with the many is not possible. Venus and Cupid have no power over him;[1] their selfish joys may be more easily bought with the gold of the voluptuary than the fidelity of friends. He looks upon his own property as belonging to his friends, and theirs, with the noblest self-deception, as at his service; when they express a wish that he may at some time have need of them he is affected even to tears; he wishes to be poorer, that he may come nearer to them: 'what need we have any friends,' he says, 'if we should never have need of them?' Liberal himself, he thinks others the same: he is convinced that his prosperity can never change so long as he has friends, that he has only to 'broach the vessels of his love,' in order to see their wealth flow out to him. When the hour of need comes, he takes his wants as blessings, because by these he can now try friends. His words to Flavius show that he thinks he has spent his money well—words which most strikingly express the thorough nature of his liberality:—

> You shall perceive how you
> Mistake my fortunes; I am wealthy in my friends.

Even when the first attempt to procure help from the senators has failed his confidence is not yet shaken; he still dis-

[1] Many foolish alterations have been made in Timon. Shadwell gave him a mistress who would not desert him, a complete disfigurement of the character. Cumberland gave him a daughter whose fortunes he ruined with his own, a degree of levity which destroys the worth of his character.

tinguishes between these cold-blooded hereditary usurers and his nearer friends.

The thoughtless giver now attains the experience which he could not have believed possible; the false friends disperse in his hour of need; those whom his feasts had attracted are repelled by his fasts. The sharp noses of the senatorial usurers first scent out his approaching bankruptcy, and they shake their heads when he requests a loan. Ventidius, whom he had ransomed, having now become rich, refuses to lend what he had received as a present. Lucullus impudently excuses himself, and tries to corrupt Timon's servant, who indignantly tosses back the money offered him. Lucius, to whom Timon has been as a father, whose estate has been supported by him, who 'ne'er drinks but Timon's silver treads upon his lip,' declares that unfortunately he has just given away all he can spare. Sempronius, who 'was the first man that e'er received gift from him,' on whom he had chiefly reckoned, pretends to be offended because he was not first applied to. Flaminius calls the first of the three the 'disease of a friend, and not himself.' The strangers call the second an ungrateful monster; Timon's servant says of the third that he is 'a goodly villain,' politic enough to cross the devil. These scenes, which Knight will not allow to be Shakespeare's, are evidently, from want of material, somewhat flat and burlesque, and better suited to comedy. But they help to show how frightfully the harvest of ingratitude was to overwhelm the liberal sower. The blackest of crimes, that which places man below the beasts, is committed towards him whose generosity resembled that of the gods; it overtakes him from those who had first sucked him dry, and whose gluttony is made by their ingratitude worse than robbery; it overtakes him, the unsuspecting one, who had never known that prudence rules the consciences of men, who had heard and spoken of bad men without ever having known them; it overtakes him through friends whom he unreservedly trusted; it overtakes him so *suddenly* that 'one winter's brush has shaken the leaves from their boughs, and left him open, bare for every storm that blows.' Is it wonderful that he cannot find words strong enough to express the monstrous mass of ingratitude he has experienced, that the image of man's unthankfulness possesses him like a fixed idea? He has bartered friendship for falsehood, society for abandonment, prodigality for avarice; he has found a curse in the midst of blessing,

misery in the midst of happiness; the shipwreck of all his noble feelings reverses his whole nature. With a mind unfortified and of little strength he cannot overcome the injuries of fate; his spirit is drowned and lost in misfortune, which he has never been inured to bear; the mere man of the world, whose mind has hitherto been only seen with a smooth surface, is now roused by the storm of passion, which reverses all things. We have before us the most lively image of the transition from one extreme to another; the want of moderation peculiar to him in one instance is evident here in the other. In this point of view Coleridge styled Timon the Lear of domestic and ordinary life. He who but now was surrounded and worshipped by all is forsaken and despised; the social man flies from mankind, whom he has found to be worse than wolves, to the animals in the solitude of the forest; he who had lived in abundance, among the most refined pleasures, now leads a forlorn life in the wilderness; the Mæcenas becomes an anchorite, the epicurean a cynic, the rich man becomes a poor castaway, and that from principle and from his own oath, which he will not break, even when chance heaps new treasures upon him; he, who was once ever friendly and kind, now arms his tongue with frightful oaths and curses; the philanthropist is become a man-hater. Now he understands all the truths which formerly he would not listen to; now he sees dogs and flatterers everywhere, when formerly he had seen none but friends; now he has learned mistrust, and can teach that which *his* credulous heart had once never known. This expansive nature has been brought by this change to an uncommon intensity. When he reflects on the exaltation of one creature above another, the rich above the poor—when he speculates upon the universal obliquity of nature, in which nothing is 'level but direct villainy,' where the lower flatter the higher—when his thoughts dwell on the unnaturalness of ingratitude or the almighty power of gold, his soliloquies are uttered with an earnestness which presents the most striking contrast to his former trivial conversation. When he invokes all the diseases of beasts and men to consume his friends, fire and ruin on house and city, plagues on the whole circle of the earth—when he vomits forth hatred against the whole human race, and wishes that his hate may grow as he grows in age, this is done in the boldest invectives ever expressed in poetry. When he strives to give actual effects to his rage and his imprecations, he does it with an obstinacy of

purpose, with a principle of condensed hatred of his kind, which lays open to us the depth of character in the now one-sided man, as his prodigality and philanthropy had formerly shown the shallowness of his many-sided nature. Mankind henceforth are only instruments or objects of his hatred. After he has, in digging for roots, found a new treasure, the society which he hates seeks him out anew in his solitude. He makes a distinction between his visitors. The old flatterers and censors, Apemantus and the artists, whom he now knew to be pernicious, he drives away with blows and stones; to the senate and the city he offers his tree that they may hang themselves on it; others he supplies with gold to corrupt humanity yet more. He makes his treasures the instrument of his present hatred, as they had been of his former love; they are to sow destructive discord among men until they perish. He furnishes Alcibiades with gold for the army he is leading to the destruction of Athens; he wishes him, who was the best of his friends, success in the siege, and confusion after he has conquered. Besides civil war, he invokes evil diseases on his hated native city; he gives the courtesans of Alcibades gold that they may live six months without following their trade, that they may adorn and strengthen themselves to be more pernicious. He gives to the thieves his gold, and his instructions to steal after the example of all nature animate and inanimate. He shares his gold with his faithful Flavius, but only on the condition that he too shall be a man-hater. Even after his death the inscription on his tomb shall announce to mankind his hatred and his curse.

In the extremity of his obdurate and immoderate hatred, the humane poet has not forgotten the original nature of the man, nor neglected to make the traces of his former goodness discernible through all his fury and curses. This, too, contributes not a little to keep in view in this play a better human nature. When Alcibiades first disturbs his repose, he pours out his fury upon him in all its strength. Immediately afterwards there flows from his lips, which he desired only to open for cursing, an involuntary prayer for blessing. He wishes that bounteous 'nature out of her fertile and conceptious womb' may rather engender unheard-of monsters than bring forth 'ingrateful man;' he bids her 'dry up her unctuous morsels, vines, and marrows,' and refuse to nourish the ingrates she had borne. Apemantus torments him, and against him Timon

rises with all the self-consciousness of his nobler nature; but even in discourse with him a kinder expression insinuates itself, proving that he thought better of women than men, not having had such evil experiences of them. The thieves come; he is kinder towards them, because, at least, they do not seem different to what they are. Even with them, as we said above, his curse works a blessing. His steward's fidelity staggers him completely. He is forced to recognise one upright man, who demands exemption from his systematic hatred; he acknowledges for once that he has gone to an immoderate excess; he confesses his 'exceptless rashness,' and prays the 'perpetual sober' gods to forgive him. But the weak man is unable to remain in this wholesome state of mind, which might have saved him; an obstinate consistency has taken hold of him, and at the same moment that he sees and confesses the fault of 'exceptless' condemnation of humanity, he strengthens his resolution to avoid all exception but this one. He returns to his obdurate hatred, in which, however, such a nature as his could not long abide. 'Philanthropy,' says Ulrici, 'was his element; misanthropy suffocated him; he could not breathe in it long.' It is usually understood that he dies of a broken heart; to us the intention of suicide seems evident in his last words. The two inscriptions which Shakespeare found in Plutarch he has condensed into one at the close of the play. The best he has put into the mouth of Alcibiades, who answers the hate-expressing inscription with one of philanthropic purport: 'Thou has taught Neptune to weep on thy low grave on faults forgiven.'

Diogenes, in Lily's 'Alexander and Campaspe,' sat to the poet for Timon's contrast, the cynic Apemantus; the quick striking epigrammatic answers to questions, which seem to be inserted here and there too much for the sake of eliciting witty replies, are quite on this model. The description of this antique fool is so perfect in its way that it is supposed Shakespeare must have seen the short sketch of a cynic which in Lucian's 'Public Sale of Philosophers' is put into the mouth of Diogenes. It is there said that in order to belong to this sect a man must be bold and shameless, revile everyone from the king to the beggar; thus he will draw all eyes upon him and appear manly. His speech must be barbarous, his voice dissonant, and exactly like a dog's; his face rigid, his expression the same, and altogether he must be brutish and rough. Shame, equity, and

moderation must be dispensed with, and blushes must be wholly banished from his countenance. He must haunt the most frequented places, but keep by himself in them, and insist on being without company, and hold no intercourse with friend or foe. All this is easy of attainment; it requires no education, no knowledge and such stuff, and yet this is the shortest road to fame. It would be as easy to suppose this to be the characterisation of Apemantus, as Apemantus a copy drawn from this description. If Shakespeare did not know Lucian's works, the way in which he has caught the spirit of antiquity is the more admirable. The poet contrasts in Timon and Apemantus the cyrenaic and cynic systems, which divided antiquity between them; and he allows it evidently and strongly to be felt that both, by representing happiness as the aim of human endeavours, set up a false standard, and that the being intent upon extreme principles will not, after all, lead to this false aim. The open and refined nature of Timon, who seeks happiness in nourishing and fostering, and in accumulating and satisfying the wants of men, who considers culture and improvement, which are the distinguishing privilege of our race, to be inseparably connected with this, who sees in sociability the best means for this refinement of all external and internal gifts and enjoyments, is contrasted with this proletary of antiquity, this cynic philosopher at the opposite extreme of Rousseau's 'Theory of Nature.' Confused by the caprice of his principles, he is extreme in frugality; born poor and needy, he makes the abnegation of all things his system; the renunciation of everything that makes man human, the degradation of human nature to brutish, the most entire self-denial, the avoidance of society and social meetings, these are the principles of his wisdom. In his one-sidedness, that poorest of all humours, he is opposed to all humanity; wine and the marrow of the earth have not made his spirit indolent, but water has drowned it from his youth. He despises art and artists, all enjoyment, dancing, and pomp are madness in his eyes. Compared with the sensitiveness of Timon's soft heart, his is quite stiff and frozen. Born in poverty, he was destined to labour, to activity, and business more than Timon, who made his money work for him; but if it were a fault in the latter that he imitated the gods in his enjoyment and bestowal of good things, the indolence and inactivity of Apemantus are much more culpable and contemptible. Timon would have helped daily out of his beggary, if this, according to the uncor-

rupted opinion of our forefathers, had been considered as a disgrace by him; but he was proud of it, gloried in not being a prodigal like Timon, though abstinence was not meritorious in his case; in the literal sense of the words he made a virtue of necessity. If the beggarly pride of this man contrasts with Timon's modesty to the immeasurable advantage of the latter, much more does Timon's disinterestedness shine by comparison with the selfishness of Apemantus, whose prayer is only for himself, notwithstanding his pretence of self-abhorrence. For all this self-degrading, this intentional impoverishment and isolation, is only, according to that suggestion of Lucian's, an affectation of originality and a real vanity to attract the eyes of mankind. Compared with this innate vanity how pardonable is that of the prodigal, generated and nourished by the thanks, the admiration, and the love of hundreds of hypocritical flatterers! If Apemantus were no flatterer except to misery, if he spoke truths and cutting truths to everyone, why should his straightforwardness be judged better than Timon's genial and considerate love of society, since the cynic's candour had its origin in nothing but his beggarly pride and vanity? He stood on the lowest step, where there was none beneath for a flatterer to stand upon, from whence he therefore refused to flatter those above him; his plain speaking flowed from the malice of a venomous, envious, and violent nature; by an instinctive acuteness it spied out every bad quality and experience, and refused to see the good; unlike Timon's endeavour to show love and kindness to all, he indulged in a habit of blame and slander; his abuse had no other aim than to enrage men, 'the office of a knave or a fool.' Contrary to the proverb, anger was in him lasting and stinging; misanthropy, which in Timon arose out of the shattering of his faith in human nature, was in him a profession, the effect of innate inhumanity and of his vain and malicious disposition. If Timon carried his love and trust to excess, so did this man his hatred and mistrust. How clearly shines the uncorrupted nature of that most spoilt of mortals, still holding his belief in human virtue; how bright the splendour of his friendship mania, compared with the suspicious disposition of this egotist, who believes in no integrity, who wonders that men dare trust themselves with men, who implores the gods to preserve him from the folly of trusting anyone! He who possesses nothing has attained to the hard-heartedness of the miser, who pretends to possess nothing.

This completes the contrast between Apemantus and Timon. In the scene in which he finally appears in contrast to the latter, the poet has deeply and excellently shown the superiority of the noble to the base nature, in spite of the errors with which the latter can truly reproach the former. How great Timon appears in comparison with the cynic, who now pretends more love for him since he has become like him, although he can scarce conceal his rage and envy, because Timon is usurping his trade and 'affecting his manners.' 'Were I like thee,' Timon says to him, 'I'd throw away myself.' He grants him his 'beastly ambition,' and wish to give the world to the beasts, and remain a beast with the beasts, and he only proves to him that among the beasts he would be as utterly worthless as among men, that the order and inequality of power and endowments, which is so hateful to him in human society, would be found there likewise. For in this communistic nature, which would have all equals, the strength of resolution and endeavour is still more wasted than in that spoiled child Timon. 'Thou'dst courtier be again wert thou not beggar,' Apemantus says to him. The power of self-denial which Timon displays on discovering the treasure is quite beyond his comprehension. Neither can he comprehend Timon's change to misanthropy, because there is in him none of the philanthropy which was Timon's nature; he would have comprehended if the man whom he had known but as a flattered superior had fallen into the other extreme of the humble flatterer. He speaks from his own feelings, and hence it is that we feel the justice of the hypothetical characterisation which Timon flings at him. 'Thou wert bred a dog!' he says:—

> Had'st thou been like us. . . . . .
> . . . . . Thou would'st have plunged thyself
> In general riot; melted down thy youth
> In different beds of lust; and never learn'd
> The icy precepts of respect . . . . . .
> . . . . . But myself,
> Who had the world as my confectionary;
> . . . . . I, to bear this,
> That never knew but better, is some burden:
> Thy nature did commence in sufferance, time
> Hath made thee hard in 't. Why should'st thou hate?
> They never flatter'd thee: What hast thou given?
> If thou had'st not been born the worst of men,
> Thou had'st been a knave and flatterer.

Among his many groundless revilings, Apemantus utters to Timon two cutting and opprobrious truths; both recoil upon himself with stronger meaning:—

> Best state, contentless,
> Hath a distracted and most wretched being,
> Worse than the worst, content.

This content Timon had possessed in his prosperity, only it could not stand by him in the overthrow of his fortunes; but the morose censurer Apemantus had never possessed it; yet—and this is the error of both these systems of life—it is not connected either with the fortune of possession or abnegation. Again Apemantus says to him, 'The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends.' To this Timon might have answered that Apemantus also had never known this middle, but only the extremity of one end.

Between these two eccentric beings Alcibiades is placed as the man of practical life, which generally blunts extremes. He is by no means shown in a very favourable light, lest he should prejudice the chief character. Shakespeare represents him without any ideality, as a man of coarse texture, who is in no way enthusiastic about the extreme ends of things; a completo soldier, who carries about with him the pleasures of peaceful life; who knows how to be poor and to be rich; not the worst of Timon's friends, who, needy himself, yet willingly offers him money for his support, and, though reviled by him, espouses his cause as his own. Prodigal of his blood, rich only in wounds, he has driven back the enemies of Athens, whilst the senators counted their money and lent on usury. He is repaid with the same ingratitude as Timon experienced from his friends; exactly like Timon's friends, they refused him the smallest favour, notwithstanding his great services, and his passionate entreaties are met with a sentence of banishment, as Timon was forsaken and cast off by his friends. The man of action becomes 'worse than mad' on this maltreatment; his principles, which he had shown in his defence of his friend the duellist, will not suffer him to bear contumelious treatment with patience. For this injustice received he takes up arms in rebellion against the state, whilst Timon casts forth his hatred upon the whole human race, too wide a mark to be reached. Timon's hatred would have been confined to passiveness had not the treasure he found given him the means of

fighting mankind with gold; Alcibiades avenges his mortification on the thankless city by arms. Where Timon nourishes universal hatred Alcibiades punishes with severity, but with discrimination. On hearing that the walls which he is about to overthrow were not built by those who have injured him he desists from the attempt. 'All have not offended,' they tell him. They offer him decimation 'if his revenges hunger for that food which nature loaths.' The warrior throws down his glove to certify that he will only punish his enemies; reconciliation quickly follows his substantial revenge and active hatred, whilst Timon, in his enmity against humanity, does not think decimation satisfaction enough. This limitless fury necessarily recoils fatally on the impotent hater. Fate had restored to him in a wonderful manner the means of taking the sweetest revenge on his false friends. He despised in obstinate bitterness what prodigal chance had freely given into his prodigal hands, and died desolate, a subject of malicious joy perhaps to his pretended friends, while the poor Alcibiades, with unpaid soldiers, preserving moderation in his aims and in his passions, punishes ingratitude, spares the penitent, and triumphs over all.

THE TEMPEST.

'THERE can be little doubt,' says Hazlitt in the introduction to his remarks on the Tempest, 'that Shakespeare was the most universal genius that ever lived. Either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, scene individable or poem unlimited, he is the only man. He has not only the same absolute command over our laughter and our tears, all the resources of passion, of wit, of thought, of observation, but he has the most unbounded range of fanciful invention, whether terrible or playful, the same insight into the world of imagination that he has into the world of reality, and over all there presides the same truth of character and nature, and the same spirit of humanity.' The pertinence of these observations becomes especially evident when we, as now, step from the antique plays into this fanciful world of mediæval superstition, out of the sober historic matter of Roman history into the airy kingdom of elemental spirits. A greater contrast cannot be imagined; and yet this play and the Winter's Tale lie close beside two of those historical plays, and the poet is quite as much at home in these opposite spheres as if he had never quitted them. In the historical plays he occupied the realistic, political, historical mind of the English people; in these he addressed the credulous imaginativeness of the existing generation from two opposite sides and out of two equally productive sources. This was the time of a general belief throughout Europe in witchcraft and magic; in England an interest in such things, even among men of the educated classes, was kept alive by a succession of works upon magic, witchcraft, and the spirit world; and King James, in his 'Demonology' (1603), having ranged himself among the writers on these subjects, may well have given food and fashion to a desire for knowledge in this direction. In conjunction with

these wonders of the unseen world, the populace were attracted by the accounts and evidences of so many real wonders in the newly discovered quarter of the globe; Shakespeare, in this play, hints satirically at those marvels of nature in distant countries which were believed in England on the evidence of lying travellers, and at the eagerness with which they rushed to see the singular forms of new animals that were exhibited to the curious. Shakespeare himself speculated, as it were, in his Tempest on this spirit of the time. He gives us a venerable magician and his spirit world, a distant island with an extraordinary monster, adventures of travel, shipwreck, and storm, all in one piece; seamen, the sea smell, Robinson Crusoe-like solitude, foreign nature, and air surround us sensibly in all parts of this drama. To make the play more attractive, the poet connected with it an event that had very recently engaged all the London world. In the year 1609 Sir George Somers sailed with nine ships for Virginia; a storm dispersed the vessels, part of them reached Virginia, part returned to England in 1610, and brought the news of the probable wreck of the Admiral's ship (the Sea Venture), which, however, had reached the Bermudas. In the year 1610 there appeared a small pamphlet, called 'The Discovery of the Bermudas or Devil's Island,' in which there was a description of the storm which had driven the Admiral's ship out of its course. The ship had sprung a leak; the sailors, exhausted with working the pumps, had fallen asleep, having already taken leave of one another, when Somers saw land, and the vessel was luckily jammed in between two rocks; they found the island uninhabited, the air mild, the land remarkably fruitful; these islands had hitherto been thought enchanted, and, on account of their storms, which Shakespeare also alludes to, Sir Walter Raleigh (1596) had given them a bad name. We perceive sufficiently from these notices that Shakespeare borrowed some of the incidents in his Tempest from these reports, and it is probable enough that they gave rise to the whole composition. We know, except this, no other origin for the Tempest. The beautiful 'Sydea' of our Jacob Ayrer is probably founded on an English play from which Shakespeare may have taken his idea of the connection between Prospero and Alonzo, Miranda and Ferdinand; but beyond this the pieces have no resemblance with each other. But Shakespeare needed nothing more to aid his invention in the composition of the play, which contains very little action,

and in which (as Schlegel says) the *dénouement* is evident from the very beginning.

The date of the Tempest is decided by its undeniable connection with Jourdan's pamphlet, and besides by the notice but lately discovered, that according to the extracts from the accounts of the Court Festivities (published by Cunningham in the writings of the Shakespeare Society) it was acted before the king at Whitehall, November 1, 1611. These dates quite set aside Hunter's assumption ('Disquisition on the Tempest') that this piece was one of the earlier works of our poet, and even that it was the 'Love's Labour Won' mentioned by Meres.

The Tempest is one of those plays which, like the Midsummer Night's Dream, may be ranged under that branch of the drama which includes operas, pastorals, and masques, and it is, therefore, explicable that when, on the revival of the theatre at the Restoration, the first curiosity of the public had been satiated with the older pieces of Shakespeare's time, and Davenant found it necessary to resort to spectacles and music to tickle the senses and please a perverted taste, this play, like Macbeth, was turned by Dryden and Davenant into a kind of opera aiming at strong effect, and later by Shadwell into a regular opera. Like all Shakespeare's plays of this kind, the action and characteristics are very simple; our remarks on the Tempest, therefore, may be very short.

We have alleged above that Timon and the Tempest appear especially prominent in the group of plays which are most deeply agitated by the overruling idea of the works of the third period—the representation of the unnatural rupture of natural ties by oppression, falsehood, and ingratitude. It treats of the rebellion of kindred, of the usurpation of one brother against another, of the ungrateful brother against the beneficent one. Duke Prospero of Milan, absorbed in his studies, has committed the government of his states to his brother Antonio, 'whom next to his child, of all the world' he loves best. His confidence created in Antonio falsehood as boundless as the trust reposed in him, the habit of power and dominion led to ambition, and out of ambition grew treachery. He arranged everything in the state to further the objects of his ambition, filled all offices with his creatures, made a league with Prospero's enemy the King of Naples, made free Milan tributary to him, obtained the help of the king's brother Sebastian, and then overthrew his own brother, and exposed him with his infant

heiress to perish on the sea. In addition to this unnatural conduct towards his brother, his prince, his niece, and his country, we see Antonio in the course of the play project another deed of unnatural treachery against his auxiliaries and his new liege lord. To escape the tribute he urges Alonzo's brother to murder the king, the similar crime which he had committed against Prospero. Both Antonio and Sebastian we find are cruel, seizing the unsuitable moment of misfortune to make bitter reproaches to Alonzo, like incarnate mockers, as Coleridge says, 'who indulge in scorn and contemptuous expressions, as a mode of getting rid of their own uneasy feelings of inferiority to the good.' Antonio is the worse sinner of the two, who, as Prospero says at the end, had entertained ambition against his own flesh and blood, and 'had expelled remorse and nature.' He says of himself:—

> Twenty consciences
> That stand 'twixt me and Milan, candied be they
> And melt, ere they molest!

Compared to him, intriguer as he is, Sebastian is like 'standing water,' which Antonio 'will teach how to flow,' that he may not as

> Ebbing men indeed,
> Most often do, so near the bottom run
> By their own fear, or sloth.

When their projects fail, and the fruit of their previous crimes is destroyed, Antonio stands petrified; Sebastian, who was at first troubled with remorse and stings of conscience, breathes again; Alonzo, after the first stroke, when he imagined his son to be lost, becomes silent, stupid, and repentant. He had gone to Tunis with his fleet, where he had given his daughter in marriage, against all advice, even against her own inclination; he has unnaturally sacrificed his own child by a political union; as a punishment for this, according to the view of Antonio and Sebastian, he is overtaken by the tempest, which, by the destruction of his son and heir, also revenges on him his crime against Milan. When he receives from Ariel the wonderful announcement that they are considered usurpers in the uninhabited island, and that perdition hangs over their heads, from which 'nothing but heart's sorrow, and a clear life ensuing' can deliver them, Antonio and Sebastian want to 'fight with the fiend;' Alonzo alone is ripened by sorrow, and maintains his

change of mind, when he desires the marriage of his son with the heiress of Milan, and penitently kneels before Miranda, now his daughter.

Prospero had been the innocent cause of his own ruin. In Milan he had entirely devoted himself to the liberal arts, wrapt in secret studies, dedicated to retirement and to the bettering of his mind. By this renunciation and neglect of worldly things he had aroused the evil nature of his brother, so

> that now he was
> The ivy which had hid the princely trunk,
> And suck'd the verdure out on't.

His proneness to intellectual things had cost him a throne, the fruit of his twelve years of study in solitude is to win it back for him. Gonzalo, one of the ministers of the King of Naples, a talkative but eloquent old man, the excellent comforter of his unfortunate master, had become the preserver of the ejected Prospero; he had furnished him in the ship with necessaries, and, what was far more, with his books of magic; true to his lord, as well as to the higher duties of humanity. Prospero holds him, therefore, in sacred remembrance as a man of unbounded honour. Cast upon an uninhabited island, his only refuge from despair was his little daughter, 'for whom henceforth alone he liv'd.' By practising his secret arts he had deprived her of the succession; he had kept up, on her account, some interest in the world, and was now about to employ the mighty development of his magic, not for his own restoration, but for hers. Before this comes to pass, before fortune puts his enemies in his power, he has had an opportunity on his island to make up, as it were, for the active duty which he had neglected; he maintains a double control over Caliban, the only dweller on the island, and over the host of spirits, whom he constrains to serve him. In this respect Prospero is, in some sense, a usurper; Caliban, who considered himself lord of the island, accuses him directly of this; and the lordship over the spirit world, according to the ideas of the time, was sinful presumption and unnatural ambition. Having been overtaken by misfortune in Milan, while studying these magic arts, he will now use his skill in them to recover the possession of that which those studies had cost him, and to use them beneficially until the time for this arrives; then he will break his magic wand, and think only of his end. But in his new kingdom Prospero seems now for the

first time to learn discipline and the art of government. Experience had taught him. He keeps all around him in strict subjection, his commands are dictatorial, and demand blind obedience and instant service. Not the monster Caliban alone fears his wrath; even his spirits serve him trembling; he uses harsh words to his favourite Ariel on the least opposition to his behests; he can even appear full of severity towards Ferdinand and Miranda. His misfortunes have made him careful and prudent, indignant and severe; but this severity does not detract from his goodness, his resentment does not disincline him to reconciliation, his desire for retribution and his anger at the unnatural conduct of the princes do not prejudice his noble nature, nor lead him to abuse his power. Herein especially lies the silent charm of this character (and to feel thoroughly the difference between poetry and poetry we must compare this with the Magicians of Green and Marlowe, with Bacon and Faust), that in spite of the mysterious omnipotence, the eminence with which this power invests him, he appears, by his mild and merciful use of it, only an ordinary well-intentioned man; a man in whom judgment has to struggle with passion, whose better nature takes part against his wrath, and whose virtue conquers his revenge; a man whose moral excellence is more powerful than his magic. He might have repaid usurpation with greater usurpation, he might have executed the murderous designs of Antonio and Sebastian against Alonzo upon themselves, but he is in all respects the humane reverse of his inhuman enemies. He is satisfied when they are penitent, and will not repay unnatural conduct with the like; for malevolence he returns benevolence; he does not forget thanks for the long past service of Gonzalo, which he rewards with deeds and words; and even here a contrast appears to lie, for far removed as he is from all abuse of power, he is so also with regard to paternal authority, and he exercises none of the compulsion towards his Miranda which Alonzo uses towards his Claribel.

The desire to unite his daughter with Ferdinand, and to make this marriage the instrument and aim of all his revenge, shows Prospero's kind but not weak nature to the best advantage; he does not, with excess of magnanimity, choose his brother's son, who is also with the fleet, though not brought forward either by Prospero or the poet; he chooses the son of Alonzo, who, as his enemy, has behaved towards him less unnaturally; Milan is thus, as Gonzalo gladly remarks, placed upon an equal

footing with Naples. The rapid development of an involuntary love of paradisiacal innocence in Ferdinand and Miranda, a love so consistent with the plans of Prospero, is quite in concordance with the nature of the circumstances. Miranda is one of those exquisite feminine creations of the poet, whose excellence does not depend on peculiar prominent qualities, but on that tranquil harmony and purity which we feel to be so agreeable and desirable in women; like Cordelia, Ophelia, or Perdita, she is one of those quiet natures whose mental worth is closed as within a bud, whose depth of character is hidden, like the fire of the diamond, until the occasion comes which strips off the concealing husk, and reveals the richness and splendour of the inner life. Reared in solitude she is like a blank leaf as regards all social gifts and conventional accomplishments; she is quiet, and of few words; but her fancy is full of inward life and playfulness, and her pure soul uninjured by intercourse with mankind. She could acquire few faults and few virtues, as opportunity for both was wanting. Thus the poet endowed her with modesty and pity, virtues which may be acquired in solitude without man, and form a soil in which every other virtue may be planted. Her father had often hinted to her that she is greater than she imagines; she had neither curiosity to learn this, nor longing to be so. She only knows that she is the daughter of the poor Prospero, so that when he reveals her parent's princely rank, she involuntarily asks, 'Sir, are not you my father?' Satisfied of this, she fancies herself, for a moment, in that better situation, and asks:—

> What foul play had we, that we came from thence,
> Or blessed was't we did?

but her next thought is pity for the care she must have caused to her banished father. Her distinguishing virtue, as Prospero intimates, is pity; we perceive it at the very beginning during the tempest, when she suffers, like a woman, with the sufferers: this makes her so desirous to see the sympathetic Gonzalo. It is very charming the way in which the poet has given several times to her silent glances the expression of pity, and that expression only. Prospero soothes her during the tempest by saying, 'There's no harm done;' and in answer to her incredulous look, he repeats 'no harm!' Immediately after, he continues:—

> I have with such provision in mine art,
> So safely ordered, that there is no soul,—

again her troubled look,

> No, not so much perdition as an hair
> Betid.

And the same is implied in Prospero's words at the end of the first act. 'Speak not for him!' thus answering an imploring look of Miranda who had not spoken.

Thus she encounters Ferdinand, and it is not suprising that, at the first moment, they exchange glances. The king's son imagines himself the only soul saved; his father, Ariel tells him, is dead; he wanders about, needing help. Prospero harshly upbraids him with wishing to usurp the sovereignty of the island, then makes him feel his power and omniscience, checks his longing, and 'binds up his spirits as in a dream.' Thus on account of his beauty and his piteous condition he becomes immediately an object of attraction to Miranda; he is the first man she has ever seen, except Prospero; her father's unfriendly treatment of him wakes up her pity more strongly—the pity for a guiltless one; for she is sure

> There's nothing ill can dwell in such a temple.

She will be surety for him; her good heart generates her trust and pity, and both her love, which she cannot hide for a moment. How natural that this encounter with a being created (as he thought, who knew woman well) 'of every creature's best,' should suddenly extinguish in him every earlier impression, should take prisoner the heart of the orphaned, the captive Ferdinand! The difficulties which the father purposely raises between this

> fair encounter
> Of two most rare affections,
> lest too light winning
> Make the prize light,

ripen in a few short hours into the purest attachment. He imposes menial work on Ferdinand, to try whether he loves; Ferdinand endures it for Miranda's sake; she offers to bear his burden for him. He tells his daughter that Ferdinand is but a Caliban in comparison with other men, but he cannot mislead her modest inclination. He hears how she listens in silent

ecstacy to the assurances of Ferdinand's love, and calls herself 'a fool to weep at what she's glad of,' tears which, caused by that feature of modesty in her, arise partly out of the consciousness of her unworthiness. The father listens while she artlessly reveals her feelings, tells her name, contrary to his command, and gives her love, in opposition to his wish. By means of this inimitably tender thread, Shakespeare has imperceptibly connected this episode with the main idea of the play; the father 'loses his daughter,' she begins with disobedience to him, she falls away, and breaks the bands of nature and of blood, but only in that case which nature and religion have hallowed, in that the daughter is to leave father and mother. Prospero, therefore, blesses the hasty bond, but with a second trial whether Ferdinand's love be pure and true, and with a solemn injunction to respect her innocence. Is this necessary with so ethereal a creature as Miranda? is it not an ungenial shadow on a picture so tender? Yet Miranda, notwithstanding her artless childhood, has received from her father, who trained her for the world, and from a rough attempt of Caliban's, some idea of lawless and faithless love; we see this from expressions which we should scarcely have expected from her lips. Her father had imparted to her moral training and accomplishments, but in the wilderness his last thought had been the conventionalities of refined society; he might well imagine the dangers of youth and solitude in the tender meetings of the pair. The masque teaches us that Cupid's arrows had been turned away from them, and there is a delicate meaning in their being discovered in the cave innocently playing at chess.

Being both wise and good, Prospero uses his paternal authority with love and severity; in like manner, also, he uses his power over the spirits. While other poets, in those days, employed their magic dramas to give pleasure to the spectators by a variety of artful tricks, how sensibly Shakespeare (without neglecting the opportunity of introducing a pretty device) used his magic merely as a symbol of the most natural relations, as if witchcraft in poetry were to him as inadmissible as it was thought in real life! When Ferdinand is separated from his companions by the magic arts of Ariel, it may also have been simply because he was the first to leap out of the ship, and being stronger than the rest, as we hear, may have sought to save himself by swimming; when Ariel kept the other princes separate from the crew, it may be because the former sprang

overboard, but the latter did not; when Ariel bewitches the sailors with sleep, he says himself that their weariness had done half the work for him; when the princes are led astray by deceptive apparitions, and cast into despair, it may be that

> their great guilt,
> Like poison given to work a great time after,
> Now 'gins to bite their spirits.

Thus we might strike the magic out of the play, and nature would remain. With the same delicate symbolism are the wonderfully fantastic images of the spirit world connected with the inner meaning of the play; and this seems to us even to surpass the skill with which a firm character, consistency, and necessity are given to this ideal world—Nature, as it were, elevated above herself, the actual brought into the region of the possible, and reason never offended by the appearance of the supernatural. The spirits which the poet has subjected to Prospero's authority are those which, according to popular belief, rule the four elements; by their aid he darkens the sun, lashes the sea into storms, raises tempests, and opens graves. Sylphs, which melt into thin air, perform the masque at his command; sea-nymphs and water-spirits sing the chorus in Ariel's song of consolation before Ferdinand; goblins, spirits of earth, he calls those whose business it is to torture Caliban with cramps and convulsions, in the form of hedgehogs and apes. If these separate functions of the subordinate spirits do not appear quite sharply defined in the play, it is the more evident that Shakespeare intended to give to Prospero's favourite messenger Ariel the united power of all these elemental spirits. At one time he appears as a sea-nymph, swimming and careering on the sea; then as a fire-spirit, who sets the ship on fire and climbs like licking flames up the mast; then as a spirit of earth, busied for Prospero in the frozen veins of the earth; his ruling nature, however, as his name intimates, is that of a sylph, a spirit of the air. In this character he is called a bird and appears in the form of a harpy, he flies and rides on the winds and 'curled clouds,' fetches dew at night from the spirit land Bermuda, vanishes invisible, and takes every visible form, deceives, leads astray, scatters, jeers, and frightens men by all sorts of apparitions, sounds, and deceptions. Grace, tenderness, speed, and especially freedom and lightness, the properties of his element, are peculiar to him. He was formerly in the service of the witch

Sycorax, for whose 'earthy and abhorred commands' he was too delicate; he slighted her behests, and she confined him, 'by help of her more potent ministers,' in a cloven pine, a torment 'to lay upon the damned,' which the witch could not again undo; but after twelve years' painful imprisonment Prospero's magic power set him free. For this benefit, the restoration to freedom, the highest Ariel knew, he gave to Prospero a service more suitable to his gentle nature; whilst the other spirits hate the magician, yet are compelled to serve him, Ariel obeys him thankfully and truly, without lies, without mistakes, without a murmur; for this, his perfect freedom, his all, is promised him within a certain time, and of this time, for good service, one year is abated. But even to wait this abridged time is painful to him; it is exquisitely conceived, and very beautiful, what a peculiarly melancholic character the poet has cast over the being and relations of this creature, divided as he is between a superior nature and the aspirings of higher feelings. Having the four elements combined in his composition, Ariel is by nature a spirit of a higher order; by his service and intercourse with a noble and beneficent man he has risen to half-human sympathies, although, according to the popular belief, these beings are indifferent, adverse, and vexatious towards the human creature. He can sympathise with the tormented consciences of the princes, whose nature he does not share; and although he 'is nothing but air,' he has imbibed somewhat of the loftier feelings of love and gratitude, albeit contrary to his nature. His lord will miss him when he has given him his freedom; but he, the airy creature, will feel no longing after his dear master, whom he only seems to love for the sake of his promised freedom. He asks for more, for speedier freedom, and Prospero must once in a month recount to the quickly forgetting spirit the benefit he has received of his hands; then the variable servant struggles with his fluctuating nature, and is again all obedience, fidelity, and promptness. It is an unnatural dominion, an unnatural bond between man and spirit, where corresponding nature and uniting sympathies are wanting; and yet this is the evident bearing of the circumstance on the action of the piece: this unnatural bond is made possible and tenable by suavity of manners, dignity, benefit, and gratitude, whereas among men who are endowed with moral sense and reason the strongest ties of nature, those between brother and brother, are unnaturally broken.

With the same intrinsic bearing on the intention of the play the much and deservedly admired character of Caliban is introduced. Even Dryden wondered at the profound truth of this creature, for which no type is found in nature. Schlegel declared the delineation of him to be made with inconceivable consistency and depth, not being offensive to the feelings, although so hateful, because the honour of humanity is not offended by it; and this creation was always the one which suggested itself when Shakespeare was commended for making the supernatural natural, the wonderful ordinary, inasmuch as in it he not only showed human nature as it *is* in actual occurrences, but also as it *would be* under temptations to which it cannot be exposed. Caliban is the very opposite to Ariel; opposite to the graceful creature both externally and internally, a tortoise in the mud, as the other was a bird in the air, an embryonic being defiled, as it were, by his earthy origin from the womb of savage nature. His mother was the witch Sycorax, who banished from Argier for 'mischiefs manifold,' grown into 'a hoop with age and envy,' had fled into this island. The devil was his father; the fruit of abominable parents, a prey to brutish impulses, reared in solitude, he was called by Schlegel, with a perfect delineation, half demon and beast, half goblin and savage. A foul bulk, resisting all active employment, a mere animal, having no sense but for good food, for flattery and stroking, for corporeal attractions and for the aerial music of the spirits, and for dreams which he pines for when awake; for the rest he is all wickedness and falsehood, cowardly too, and born to be a slave although he murmurs at subjection. Prospero found him on the island 'gabbling like a thing most brutish,' not knowing his own meaning; he treated him with humane care, took pains to tame him, gave him the elements of knowledge, and taught him to speak. But this humanity was thrown away upon him, education did not suit his nature; he used his speech only to curse his benefactor, he remained insensible to kindness, and could only be restrained by fear and chastisement; he learned, as a brute, to keep company with men, but not to love them; his vile race

> Had that in't which good natures
> Could not abide to be with.

Prospero obtained the mastery over him, and, as Caliban complains, took the island from him, as that was the only way to

escape his violence; he justified the usurpation by endeavouring to humanise him. But he missed his aim, like those English colonists in America, who in the most human manner laboured after the civilisation of the Indians—tribes which were felt by Brainerd and the like to be inexpressibly indolent and dull, devoid of gratitude as well as of generosity, benevolence, and goodness—a nature irreconcilable with genuine human nature. The beastly creature preferred the company of beastly men to that of his benefactor; he stumbles on the drunkard, who had debased himself to a condition of greater irrationality than the other was born to; the gift of his bottle attracts him more than Prospero's lessons, he takes the burly Stephano for his king, and joins with him in a conspiracy against Prospero, which is a burlesque imitation of the conspiracy of the princes. Not like Ariel with forgetful gratitude, but with hardened clumsy ingratitude and hatred, he conspires against his benefactor, not feeling the value of the benefit; he takes the stranger for his lord, kissing his feet, claiming and renouncing the sovereignty at the same moment, as Antonio had done with Alonzo. We may forgive this wild creature, who had less to attract him to men than Ariel; but how can we forgive Antonio an Sebastian! And yet even this monster acknowledges at last the folly of his behaviour, and promises amendment. What a light is by this reflected on Antonio, who remains hardened in sullen spite to the last!

It is not impossible that Shakespeare in this play, and especially in regard to this Caliban (whose name is a mere anagram of Cannibal), meant to answer the great question of the day concerning the justifiableness of European usurpation over the wild aborigines of the new world; he felt a warm interest in English colonisation, in the creation of new nations, that marked the reign of James; Southampton was a prominent character in the Virginia Company, and shared with Sandys and Wyatt the merit of first founding the political freedom of the colonists. If it were indeed the poet's intention to give this historical background to the story of Antonio's usurpation, it is a further evidence of his wide views of history and of his unbiassed mind, entirely free as it was from all false sentimentality. He shows the scrupulous philosophers, who doubted the lawfulness of colonisation, the evils of policy and morality *at home*, where deeds quite as unnatural are practised as could have been accomplished there. He perceived that what hap-

pened in the new world at that time was necessary, that with the extension of mankind superiority of spiritual and moral power would ever inundate the realms of rudeness and barbarism, streaming, as it were, into an empty space. Shakespeare has still further displayed the pure healthiness of his political and historical wisdom in a scene of this play, in composing which he has evidently had before him a chapter of Montaigne's 'Essays' (I. 10) in Florio's translation (1603). He lets old Gonzalo, not in earnest, but in playful conversation, describe the system of the communists, socialists, and peace-congresses, and he makes Alonzo give his opinion upon it. We will only quote the passage; it were a pity to add a single word:—

Gon. I' the commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things; for no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; no use of service,
Of riches, or of poverty; no contracts,
Successions, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none:
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil:
No occupation; all men idle, all;
And women too; but innocent and pure:
No sovereignty;—
Seb. And yet he would be king on't.
Ant. The latter end of his commonwealth forgets
The beginning.
Gon. All things in common nature should produce
Without sweat or endeavour: treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,
Would I not have; but nature should bring forth,
Of its own kind, all foizon, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people.
Seb. No marrying 'mong his subjects?
Ant. None, man; all idle; whores and knaves.
Gon. I would with such perfection govern, sir,
To excel the golden age.
Alon. Pr'ythee, no more: *thou dost talk nothing to me!*

THE WINTER'S TALE.

ACCORDING to a notice discovered by Malone, the Winter's Tale was first licensed for representation by Sir George Buck, who entered upon his office of Master of the Revels in October, 1610; on the 15th of May, 1611, Dr. Forman saw the play at the Globe; it must, therefore, have been produced between these dates, at the same time as the Tempest. It was acted at Whitehall on the 5th November, 1611, four days after the Tempest. In the story from which Shakespeare took the matter of the Winter's Tale, the exposure of Perdita on the sea is very like the exposure of Miranda and her father, described in the Tempest; the dramatist made an alteration in this part, to avoid repetition; Collier takes this as a proof that the Tempest was written first, but it can only indicate that the plan of both pieces was sketched at about the same time. The contemporaneous appearance of the two is further confirmed by a sarcasm of Ben Jonson's (in his 'Bartholomew Fair,' 1614), which alludes to both.[1]

Shakespeare's source for the Winter's Tale is Greene's 'History of Dorastus and Faunia,' which appeared first in 1588, under the title 'Pandosto,' but our poet used a later edition, probably that of 1609. Shakespeare in many passages borrowed words and whole speeches from this narrative; he changed the names of the personages, but kept, on the whole, close to the story, though altering and enlarging it on some essential points. In Greene's narrative, the adventures of Dorastus and Faunia (Florizel and Perdita) are the main object, to which the earlier part only serves as an introduction.

[1] The often quoted passage in the Induction is as follows:—'*If* there be never a *Servant-monster* i' the fayre, who can helpe it, he sayes; nor a nest of *Antiques*? He is loth to make nature afraid in his *playes*, like those that beget *Tales, Tempests*, and such like *Drolleries*.'

The King of Bohemia (Pandosto) is here the jealous husband; the King of Sicily (Egistus) is the visitor, whose royal hostess (Bellaria) is commanded by her spouse to do him all honour. Her new-born child is cast into the sea and abandoned to the winds and waves by the jealous King of Bohemia, whose son dies, as in Shakespeare, according to the oracle, which is similar in purport here to that in the Winter's Tale; but the queen is really, and not merely apparently, taken from her husband by death. In Greene's narrative the real matter only now begins. Dorastus is designed by his father for a Danish princess, but he is cold to all love. To be revenged for this, Cupid leads him, when engaged in hawking, to Faunia. The love of these two is only described by Shakespeare in its progress; in the other its origin is fully dwelt upon, in the manner of the Italian pastorals; the struggle between passion and the claims of rank is the main point; the triumph of love is the aim of the narrative. The pair escape on board a ship before the king knows of the engagement. Capnio, a servant of the prince's, answering to Shakespeare's Autolycus, brings on board the shepherd, who is to discover the love affair, and to show Faunia's trinkets to the king; a storm, not Camillo as in Shakespeare, drives the fugitives to Bohemia. Here Faunia's father falls in love with her, a situation only slightly hinted at in Shakespeare. When all is explained, Pandosto (Leontes), overcome with melancholy on account of this love for his daughter and his former jealousy, is driven to self-destruction.

Shakespeare has treated this narrative in the way he has usually dealt with his bad originals—he has done away with some indelicacy in the matter, and some unnatural things in the form; he has given a better foundation to the characters and course of events; but to impart an intrinsic value to the subject as a whole, to bring a double action into unity, and to give to the play the character of a regular drama by mere arrangements of matter and alteration of motive was not possible. The wildness of the fiction, the improbability and contingency of the events, the gap in the time which divides the two actions between two generations, could not be repaired by any art. Shakespeare, therefore, began upon his theme in quite an opposite direction. He increased still more the marvellous and miraculous in the given subject, he disregarded more and more the requirements of the real and probable, and treated time, place, and circumstances with the utmost arbi-

trariness. He added the character of Antigonus and his death by the bear, Paulina and her second marriage in old age, the pretended death and the long forbearance and preservation of Hermione, Autolycus and his cunning tricks, and he increased thereby the improbable circumstances and strange incidents. He overleaped all limits, mixing up together Russian emperors and the Delphic oracle and Julio Romano, chivalry and heathendom, ancient forms of religion and Whitsuntide pastorals. Greene had already taught him to pay no attention to probability with regard to place, since in his narrative reference had already been made to the *sea-shore* in Bohemia and to the *Island* of Delphos. Added to this, there are mistakes in the style of those of Cervantes, where the theft of Sancho Panza's ass is forgotten. Prince Florizel, who (in Act IV. sc. 3) appears in *shepherd's clothes*, exchanges immediately afterwards his *court garments* with Autolycus in the same scene; the old shepherd (Act III. sc. 3) knows at once, whence does not appear, that the slaughtered Antigonus was an old man. Ben Jonson and Dryden have made all this of far too much consequence, even while laughing at it. Pope has even doubted the genuineness of the play. The scenic effect, the excellent characterisation of certain personages, and the beauty of the language of the play were acknowledged, but the poet was continually upbraided for those very marvels which, in our opinion, he only intended as such. Three times in the play, and once for all in the title, he dwelt as emphatically as possible on the fictitious character of the play, which is wholly founded on the incredible and improbable. If we *will* dispute with him, it must be on the one point only—whether fictions be admissible on the stage or not. We must not criticise mistakes here and there, which, if that admissibility be allowed, may well have been purposed by the poet. Shakespeare could have answered the question as to the fitness of this style by pointing to the stage, where this play always met with success, both in Garrick's unsuitable abridgment (under the title of 'Florizel and Perdita'), and later in Mrs. Siddons' time in its proper form. He would have granted that a dramatised fiction is still only a fiction, and as such is not a piece that will ever be ranked among the highest kinds of dramatic art. He would allow that the liberties taken had already unfitted the play for so high a place. While Shakespeare has at other times permitted in his dramas the existence of a two-fold action, connected by a

common idea, it was not necessary, in the instance before us, to sever the wasp-like body of Greene's story, nor could he have entirely concentrated the two actions; he could but connect them indistinctly by a leading idea in both, although the manner in which he has outwardly connected them is a delicate and spirited piece of art, uniting, as he has done, tragedy and comedy, making the one elevate the other, and thus enriching the stage with a tragi-comic pastoral, a combination wholly unknown even to the good Polonius. The poet, perhaps, would have moreover confessed, with reference to the censures respecting this play, that this very union of tragedy and comedy, of the grave character in the first part with the light machinery of the second, is out of true proportion. Notwithstanding, much has been done even in this point to remove the reproach of superficial treatment. Shakespeare, in conformity with the character of the tale, has, as in Greene's narrative, made use of the dominion of fate in his drama; the Delphic oracle decides the tragic catastrophe of the first part, and prepares for the happy conclusion in the second. That which seems accidental in the occurrences, such as the wonderful finding of Perdita in her infancy by the shepherd, and when grown up by Florizel, is attributed to the arrangement of Providence, and thus falls in more naturally with the pragmatically ordered portions of the action. But even this machinery of Providence is limited, as in Cymbeline, to such occurrences as the above, where men, properly speaking, have no part. Everywhere else we might strike out the direct interference of fate, and the events would remain explicable according to nature. In Greene's story, the boy Mamillius dies, in accordance with the oracle; in Shakespeare's, he dies not only for that reason, but because the early ripe child, too tender a vessel for his high thoughts, takes the ignominy of his mother too much to heart. Greene makes Hermione die, that Leontes may have no other heirs; Shakespeare keeps the guiltless wife alive, and her part is so contrived that the prediction of the oracle can be fulfilled by her resignation. According to Greene, the winds and the waves carry the child, exposed to their fury, to the country of the king, whom Leontes believes to be its father; according to Shakespeare, Antigonus, believing in Hermione's guilt, takes it there intentionally. According to Greene, it is a storm that drives Florizel and Perdita to her father's kingdom; according to Shakespeare, they go thither by the advice of Camillo. And

so we find throughout that the poet, in spite of his intention to represent a fiction, has everywhere avoided any useless display of arbitrary power.

According to what we have said above, we have to describe not only two actions, but two pieces in one. The subject of the first—the tragic portion—is the jealousy of Leontes. Coleridge thought fit to read this play in immediate connection with Othello, whose jealousy is in every respect the reverse of that of Leontes. It is so in fact, although we understand the contrast differently to Coleridge. The jealousy of Leontes, and of Othello also, is not founded on the sensitive faculty alone; in Othello it is deeply connected with his feelings of honour; in Leontes with tyranny, as Shakespeare says. We should define it more clearly if we were to say with wilfulness. Shakespeare has in both instances shown us the origin of this passion out of a mere nothing, and its frightful consequences; the destruction of the whole happiness of life in the one, and the happiness of half a life in the other, from the madness of a moment. The pervading difference is that Othello, little disposed to jealousy by nature, is made susceptible of it by circumstances and situations, he is driven to it by a cunning whisperer and deceiver; whereas Leontes, by nature prone to it, has no outward circumstances to induce it, and is his own suggester. The difference of situation in the two is striking; Othello is led to doubt the friend of whom he is jealous by facts not to be denied; he is made to perceive that in his wife her own father had reasons for being deceived; the Moor is doubtful of himself and of his own qualities, and he conceives a mistrust of himself and of the world, which was rooted in his whole situation; all this heaped together the smouldering fire of his jealousy, which the false Iago blew into a flame. But Leontes' situation is quite different; he has no causes of jealousy against his wife, none against his friend; the resemblance to himself of his eldest and of his new-born child is a fact that he must himself acknowledge as against his suspicion; his self-reliance, his royal rank prevent in him the all-pervading feeling of Othello, who thinks himself despised; all those around him, the courtiers, Camillo, Antigonus, Paulina, loudly and firmly testify against his delusion; but there is that within himself more dangerous than the slanderer at Othello's side. After his conscience has been once infected, after Hermione's friendly invitation and its rejoinder have aroused his

suspicion, he is the slave, not of love, not of passion, not of feeling, but of his own imagination; dwelling on his own imaginings, he gives way to the most extraordinary brooding over improbable and impossible things, until he is satisfied of the infallibility of his convictions, and confirmed in the obstinacy which characterises the weak judgment of all wilful persons. This obstinacy, this hard-headedness, embitters his disposition, and far from feeling, like Othello, pain for his loss, Leontes indulges in hatred and persecution, and increases both through his dread of intrigues, which exist only in his own imagination. The contrast between this wilfulness, this presumed certainty and superior judgment, and the unsuspecting short-sightedness of Othello is perfect, and masterly in both is the progress of the delusion, built on quite different foundations. In contrast with the taciturn Othello, Leontes, in keeping with his moody and suspicious nature, is a great talker, in whom thoughts and quick fancies throng, mingle, and pass rapidly from one object to another.

The idea of his wife's faithlessness arises in Leontes from the quick result of her entreaty to Polixenes to prolong his stay a little. The contingent motives to suspicion are by far not so important as those which Othello thought he had. She tells him he asks coldly; she proves to him that she understands how to entreat better; she speaks to their guest with open, innocent heartiness, and gives her hand to him in the same spirit. This actually is the whole ground for Leontes' jealousy. He now remembers that Hermione had once made him wait months for her consent; he examines with suspicion the features of his son. He sees her hold up her mouth to kiss Polixenes, he sees them exchange meaning smiles in his very presence. He is convinced it is not an approaching transgression, but a crime of long standing; he knows it, he is certain of it; it is a fact to him that no woman can be kept from unfaithfulness. 'Contempt and clamour,' he fears, 'will be his knell.' For such determined people nothing is worse than contradiction; it only makes them more clear-sighted and more obstinate. When Camillo positively and with reproaches refuses to agree to his accusations of Hermione, he insists that they have whispered together, leaned cheek to cheek, kissed 'with inside lip,' stopped 'the career of laughter with a sigh—a note infallible of breaking honesty.' 'Is this nothing?' he says :—

> Why then the world, and all that 's in 't, is nothing;
> The covering sky is nothing; Bohemia nothing.

When Camillo makes question of it, he bids him 'go rot;' rather than allow it possible that he should be mistaken, rather than have his belief, his phantom disturbed, he will pronounce the old, honoured, experienced, noble Camillo, who had been as a father confessor to him, to be blind, deaf, indiscreet, cowardly, dishonourable, time-serving, his well-meaning courtiers to be cold and indifferent, and he will fly into a rage with Antigonus for not believing him. Camillo promises to poison Polixenes, inducing him by this deception to promise that he will continue to be friendly to his guest, and attempt nothing against the honour of Hermione. The weak Leontes breaks one promise before he has crossed the threshold, the other when Camillo has fled with Polixenes. For now a greater suspicion seizes him, that they are all conspiring against him and aiming at his life; he now passes sleepless nights, fear still further poisons his disposition, and he tries the queen for her life, not regarding her approaching delivery. What is still worse, this flight has increased ten-fold his blind wilfulness; the over-cunning one sighs for 'lesser knowledge;' his keenness has succeeded, and he laments it. Hermione's noble presence makes no alteration in his impressions; he insists that his child is a bastard:—

> If I mistake
> In those foundations which I build upon,
> The centre is not big enough to bear
> A school-boy's top.

The queen is delivered; unfortunately the over-hasty Paulina brings the child into the presence of Leontes with angry reproaches; in his rage at this he wishes to have the child burnt; he then desires Antigonus to expose it. His obstinacy and wilfulness go hand in hand with this hard-heartedness and tyranny; these gross mistakes in judgment are followed by the last and greatest mistakes of his obstinacy. He has sent messengers to the oracle in order to satisfy the incredulity of the people; for himself he needs no oracle. He will observe right and justice towards his wife, for he is perfectly satisfied that he is right. The oracle is read in open court, and, contrary to oracular decrees in general, it plainly and clearly testifies to Hermione's innocence. And now his wilfulness goes so far as to tax even the oracle with falsehood. He is immediately over-

taken by the death of his son, as the first actual fulfilment of the Delphic sentence, and now his obstinacy begins to yield.

Shakespeare has given Leontes a wife and a monitress who are both better fitted to guide him to the false origin of his delusion than Desdemona and Emilia were with respect to Othello. Hermione is soft as 'childhood and grace;' she is also full of dignity and majesty. She unites to Desdemona's goodness a discretion, thoughtfulness, and eloquence which the other did not possess. Desdemona consented unreflectingly to a secret marriage with the Moor, to whom she had offered herself; Hermione, on the legitimate proposal of Leontes, had required some months for consideration, then, however, she was his for ever. This calm reflection, this resolution after reflection, this strong feeling of honour and duty, and the consciousness of moral nobility, penetrate the whole character of Hermione, and render it a strong contrast to Desdemona's. When she becomes aware of the suspicion of the king, she does not, like Desdemona, utter in her confusion things that may seem to criminate herself; her *husband* shrinks from uttering the word that would brand her whole life and character; but *she* does not, like Desdemona, shrink from it, because she is too conscious of her purity to fear that she could stain herself by it; notwithstanding her mental agitation, her answers are 'calm,' even proud; she is sorrowfully firm in her resignation. She, like Desdemona, keeps back her tears, but not like her from surprise and offence; they are contrary to her pious, resigned character, which makes her look upon this unexpected occurrence as sent for her good. She even bids her women spare their tears until they find she has deserved her imprisonment. To speak before the court of justice as Hermione did would have been hard for Desdemona; it was not her way to look her situation in the face; frightful presentiments arise in the depths of her soul, but she banishes them from her thoughts. Hermione, on the contrary, prepares for the worst, reconciles herself to the idea of losing her life, which, like her sorrow after the experience she has just had, she esteems but lightly; yet she, the Russian emperor's daughter, defends her honour with persuasive eloquence, lest her disgrace should descend upon her child. This outward honour would have been the last thing the sensitive Desdemona would have thought about; she had enjoyed too early and too bright a happiness, and she could not calmly have resigned both happiness and life. But then she had not witnessed the exposure

of her child; she had not had time to reflect on the lost love of her husband; she had not been separated, as one infected, from her other child, and robbed of all regard. This had roused in Hermione the self-respect belonging to a woman, to the daughter of the emperor, and made her hear the accusation with dignity and magnanimity, and submit with patience to her fate. This calm and noble bearing, which would have shaken Othello in his delusion, made no impression upon her husband.

On the contrary, the violent reproaches with which Paulina on the other side overwhelms him make a bad impression on Leontes. Nothing excites our anger more than the obstinate delusion of a reasonable creature, the wilful blindness of caprice. Hence the propriety of Kent's outburst before Lear, of Emilia against Othello, of this Paulina against Leontes. They express our own feelings. This wife of Antigonus is a masculine woman, who sometimes snatches the reins out of the hands of her husband, who lets her run on because he knows she will not stumble. Her warnings and reproaches to the king and his silent courtiers are not amiable, when she advises them, as they value their eyes, to lay no hands upon her; yet what she says to him is true, that she is 'as honest as he is mad.' She is harsh and blunt in speech, but brave in action; we like her from the moment that she uses all the privileges of her sex for her noble mistress, risks all favour, and despises all danger. She may, however, justly be blamed for stirring up the king by her rage to murder his child, which her husband, Antigonus, in his weakness, swears to expose; through this she loses her husband, and he loses his life. When the queen has fainted on hearing the news of Mamillius' death, Paulina intentionally drives the king to despair, in the extremest outburst of her anger, by the announcement of her death. This is the moment when the tragedy is finished, and when the first ray gleams out of the darkness, promising the dawn of a better fate. In this change from tragedy to comedy there is a transition, a blending in the poetic colouring, as if the poet had studied the painter's art.

The moment that Leontes, with the reckless obstinacy of a truly tragic character, pours contempt upon the oracle, this nature changes in him suddenly, and turns to its opposite. In the disposition of his head and heart, this character combined excitability and exaggeration with weakness, and this made the revolution in his nature possible. When at the highest pitch of his fury he commands that the child should be

burnt, and then, yielding to the entreaties of those around him, allows it to be only exposed to perish, his over-excited rage gives way; he feels this to be the case himself when he says:—

> I am a feather for each wind that blows.

The first stroke, which confirms the truth of the oracle, shakes him in a moment; he quickly repents of the blasphemy; he rapidly glances at all the circumstances as they are; Camillo comes out cleared from his suspicions; he confesses in open court his attempt on the life of Polixenes, and when Paulina declares him to be a tyrant forsaken by the gods, and given up to despair, he does not think she speaks too strongly. He is reconciled afterwards with Polixenes; he recalls Camillo; once a day he will visit the grave of his wife, and shed tears there 'so long as nature will bear up with the exercise.' At first he felt that his fancied conjugal disgrace would bring him to his grave, but soon after he made a characteristic remark, which proved he did not belong to those tragic natures easily broken down by misfortunes:—

> Should all despair
> That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind
> Would hang themselves.

He found, however, in the very universality of the evil, comfort to keep him from despair. He retains this tough nature after the death of his wife and son, and under the decree of the oracle, which deprived him of all hope of heirs. Camillo declared of him, at a later period, that 'no sorrow ever lived so long' as that of Leontes, 'it would have killed itself sooner;' but in this self-tormenting nature, sorrow maintains itself as life does. Paulina keeps alive his repentance, and induces him to remain unmarried, helping him later to overcome a transient temptation when Perdita reminds him of Hermione. Paulina, too, whose tragic vein displays itself in the vehemence with which she stirs up the dangerous humour of the king, changes at the same moment that the king does. When he is cut to the heart by her fierce invectives, she suddenly perceives that she 'has shown too much the rashness of a woman.' With this confession she leaves it off. She looks upon herself henceforth as a priestess, as the fulfiller of the oracular decree. Hermione is saved; Paulina only feigns that she is dead; the queen has the pious resignation, which we have already observed to be a fundamental principle in her, to keep apart from her husband

for sixteen years, that there might be no temptation to challenge the fate which denied an heir to Leontes, until the child, which he exposed to perish, were found again. This renunciation in all three—in Leontes, Hermione, and Paulina—disarms the anger of the gods, and keeps alive the hope of the child's recovery.

While thus among the chief personages, at the moment of the catastrophe, the poet has intermingled with the tragic element a happier disposition of things, which suddenly scatters the gathering storm of fate, he has also represented this same change in outward circumstances and in the character of the events in the last scene of the third act, which comprises the close of the tragedy and the commencement of the comedy. The scene changes from the halls of the royal city, stained with deeds offensive to the gods, to the sea-shore of Bohemia. Antigonus, a contrast to Camillo, executes the cruel command of the king. He does what he never should have done, in obedience to the oath which he never should have sworn, when dreams have made the hitherto sensible man superstitious and suspicious concerning Hermione, a suspicion which would never have reached his Paulina, even in a dream. He lays down the little lost one (Perdita) in the wild place as a storm is coming on, and for this act he and all his instruments perish. While Antigonus is slain by a bear, and his ship wrecked in the storm, the babe, rocked to sleep by the tempest, is found, as the storm dies away, by the honest shepherd who is to bring her up; the grave tragic personages, who were the sole actors in the first part, wherein scarce a jest or a pun is to be found, are now exchanged for idyllic, innocent, merry beings, who predominate in the second part. Here, where the good and bad incidents meet, the tone of the story changes: with better deeds comes better fortune. The two shepherds in their simplicity say to each other:—

> Thou meet'st with things dying; I with things new born;

and at the close:—

> 'T is a lucky day; and we'll do good deeds on't.

We pass over a period of sixteen years, and find Perdita grown up. How changed the scene is! A sheep-shearing, with shepherds, guests of high and low degree, princes and patrons; a fair, a dance of shepherds, songs, flowers, and

wreaths; a pleasant autumn day full of life and joy, and then, in the midst of all, an event that threatens another tragedy. But how different are the persons who act in this scene! Perdita is grown up an innocent shepherdess,

> Pure as the fann'd snow,
> That's bolted by the northern blast twice o'er,

lovely and gentle, whom all that she wears becomes, who, if she founded sects, would have all mankind her proselytes. The most precious mental qualities unite in her in a rare combination. She is modest and retiring, she cares little, although a wealthy shepherd's daughter, for dress and ornaments, and at the feast which they are celebrating she cannot play the hostess without blushing. The unsophisticated child of nature, she cannot endure false colours in men, nor even in flowers. She loves not 'piedness' in flowers, nor even improved trees; and though she cannot answer the objections which Polixenes raises against this taste, she adheres to it like a woman, and for what Shakespeare calls 'women's reasons.' For herself she has no desire to leave her garden of nature for the artificial world, although the love of Florizel offers her the smiling prospect of it, and although she herself feels that she could adorn her place there as well as here. For all she does 'smacks of something greater;' when she has 'most goddess-like pranked up' herself in gay attire like Flora, the royal blood within her stirs, and she feels 'her robe does change her disposition,' and that she speaks more loftily. Yet she does not let her modest mind dwell lightly on this prospect; her heart forebodes an evil end to their love; she timidly foresees that his love or her life must end, but, wrapped in the happy present, she looks with calm resignation towards the future. The poet has endowed her with the resigned nature of her mother Hermione, and the strength with which this resignation arms her will prove itself in the hour of trial. Florizel's good falcon, an ominous bird, had led him first to her father's ground. He, on his side, has inherited from his father a mode of thought which the king once declared, when he was in Sicily, but had forgotten in his old age, that to be

> Clerklike, experienced, no less adorns
> Our gentry, than our parents' noble names,
> In whose succession we are gentle.

He wooes the shepherd's child with purest intentions, swears to her a faithful oath that he will abandon power, knowledge,

beauty, even his inheritance, to belong to her; and he, too, proves how sacred he esteems his oath. Here, then, lies the delicate point that unites the second part of the Winter's Tale with the first. Here is a love incompatible from a parental and conventional point of view, as in the first part there was a suspected love inadmissible on conjugal and moral grounds. Polixenes does not condemn, like Leontes, blindly and inconsiderately; he goes and convinces himself, and tries the intentions of the delinquents. He finds them blameless—the maiden even bewitching, only that the son fails somewhat in respect of filial piety in spite of the thrice repeated well-meant warning of his father. Hereupon the father, like Leontes, is over-hasty in his rage. He will not endure the sight of his son; he threatens the lives of the shepherd and his daughter; he recalls the sentence, but holds them responsible for the breaking off of the connection, and by this constrains them to flee. The slight reference and resemblance to the previous action is evident here also. Leontes had sinned against Florizel's father; therefore Heaven left him without an heir. Polixenes threatens to sin against Leontes' daughter, and therefore Heaven threatens that he shall likewise lose his heir. And this through the virtue of the children, which procures a better fate for all. The most extraordinary features of character are here indicated by a few strokes. Perdita, convinced from the first that there could not be a happy ending to her love, was not much shocked by the burst of rage in the father at first so friendly; her self-respect is touched:—

> Once or twice
> She was about to speak, and tell him plainly,
> The self-same sun, that shines upon his court,
> Hides not his visage from the cottage,

but she refrained, for, being now awakened from this dream of hers, she'll 'queen it no inch further, but milk her ewes and weep.' These traits show us how admirably Shakespeare has bestowed on the kingly shepherdess-daughter, not the external manners of rank belonging to her mother, but her mother's nature. Proud and self-respecting like her, she is called upon to defend herself publicly; she has the same desire to speak, but not the same cultivated gift of eloquence; and closely united with her self-respect, she has, like Hermione, a power of self-denial and pious resignation to fate. She has also the

same power of bearing misfortune with firmness. Florizel will not give her up. He is driven to the most desperate resolves, ready to be with Perdita—

> the slaves of chance, and flies
> Of every wind that blows;

for he calls this despair honesty. Camillo, the medicine of both houses, preserver of both parents and children (whose union with the other preserver, Paulina, has therefore a suitable sense, notwithstanding her age, which is unsuitable for marriage), Camillo turns him aside from this despondency into 'a course more promising,' and induces him to go to Sicily. Otherwise he predicts the alteration of their love by affliction. This Perdita quickly contradicts:—

> Affliction may subdue the cheek,
> But not take in the mind.

Camillo is astonished at the remark, but Florizel bears testimony to it, and then Camillo, with admiration, says that 'she seems a mistress to most that teach.' Then appears her exquisite modesty, which even sorrow could not change, as she answers:—

> Your pardon, sir, for this;
> I'll blush you thanks.

We see at once that these are not the colours and scenes, the personages and circumstances, of tragedy. But the instruments which fate employs to unfold the hitherto complicated plot display the comic character more distinctly still. The shepherds, father and son, speak for themselves; Autolycus, who by his tricks brings both these persons, together with their secret, on board the vessel which is escaping, becomes thereby the cause of the happy ending; he is (the gods being propitious) the comic representative of fate, as Antigonus in the first part was the tragic. According to his name a son of Mercury, a pick-pocket like him, the very pattern of rogues, like the hero of a Spanish Picaro romance, he is an entirely new character in the whole range of Shakespeare's personages. Driven about among mankind in all directions by fate, he at one time served Prince Florizel; then, whipped out of the court, he became 'ape bearer,' bailiff, strolling player; then he married a tinker's wife; now he is a pedlar, of the best humour, of great impertinence, one who knows men well, a denier of the

life to come, with an open ear, a quick eye, and a nimble hand, accustomed to play all parts, and therefore one of those master-themes for the actor which Shakespeare so loved to delineate. Hardened as he is in knavery, he retained his adherence to Florizel. Influenced by this, and by a spice of knavery towards the king, he conceals the prince's flight; he then brings the shepherds on board, that they may not obstruct his escape. The rest of his tricks, by favour of the propitious stars, turns out for the best; he does 'good against his will.' The mistaken honesty of Antigonus had led him to death; the deceit of Autolycus conducts the complicated destinies of both the royal houses to a happy development, and the cheat himself to a fortunate end. The gallows were his due, but, as everything turns out well and happily, his fate is a better one than he deserves.

Shakespeare has written little that can compare with the fourth act of the Winter's Tale for variety, liveliness, and beauty. But the fifth act rises still higher in the magic scene of the re-animation of Hermione, and the description of the recognition that precedes it. The poet has wisely placed this event behind the scenes, otherwise the play would have been too full of powerful scenes. 'The dignity of this act,' it is said, 'was worth the audience of kings and princes; but the actors too, who should play these scenes worthily, ought to be kings.' The mere relation of this meeting is in itself a rare masterpiece of prose description.

To those who read these two last plays, the Winter's Tale and the Tempest, in succession, it must appear incontestable that Shakespeare in the free handling of this tale, as is distinctly intimated in the prologue to the fourth act, which we have already quoted, wished purposely to brave the narrow-minded upholders of the unities of time and place. It was, therefore, undoubtedly on purpose also that he elaborated these two plays contemporaneously; for in the Tempest he observed the unities with even greater strictness than they are preserved in the classic tragedies. The scene lies throughout in front of Prospero's cell or in its immediate vicinity; the time is limited to three or four hours. As in the Winter's Tale the character of the tale is three times put prominently forward, so in the Tempest this period is three times forcibly enunciated, and Steevens thought it very probable that Shakespeare wished to prove once for all that even the unities were no difficulty to

him. And he showed this in a piece of an entirely romantic cast, as rich in wonders as the Winter's Tale. But in the very plays where Shakespeare observed this regularity, or approached it, the unnatural effect of it becomes most striking. This has been already remarked by others in the Tempest. The unnatural hurrying on of the action is immediately observable when the poet does not allow us to have the power of imagining a more lengthened period, such as the nature of the incidents may require. Time is wanting for the change of feelings which Miranda must experience, if we circumscribe their beginning and ending within the limits of three hours. This is much more evident when we examine other plays from this point of view. If, for example, we strike out one or two speeches in the last four acts of Othello, we may limit the progress of Othello's jealousy, and the events connected with it, to two days and nights. But how unnatural would it be that a passion of such strength and greatness should arise, grow, and end in twenty-four hours! Such a procrustean treatment of the action might well appear to Shakespeare a deadly sin against poetry; he did not consider the lengthening of the time a fault, because it was a necessity, to which the rule of unity only illusively gave way. How little he cared for the illusion in this respect he has shown, not in Othello, but in a great many of his other plays, most markedly. In spite of an apparently connected and short period in the action, he has very often freely scattered indications (as in Othello the hints about the correspondence between Iago and Roderigo) by which the action, though it passes quickly before the eye, is extended for the ear and for the imagination to the time which it would naturally require. He has introduced a greater depth of time behind the narrow dramatic foreground, so that, like space in perspective, time here extends to the background according to the requirements of the action. These are not the only means to which the genius of Shakespeare has resorted in order to give his scenic representations the utmost possible fulness compatible with the narrow space allotted to the drama. He tried by expedients of another kind also to attain this same end; and among them, some not less strikingly opposed to other rules of prosaic reason than the above. To give only one instance. It often happens that the scenes represented on the stage, and the description of them given in words and speeches afterwards, do not entirely agree; a contrast to the epos, where they generally correspond

word for word. The most striking example of this is in Cymbeline, where Iachimo relates his wager with Posthumus with circumstances quite different to the scenic representation of it. It would be foolish to say these discrepancies of time and matter were inadvertencies; the player who acted the character of Iachimo must have remarked the variation, and it is not to be supposed that he would have failed to point it out to the poet composing for him, who nevertheless would not have altered it. For these variations are of the greatest use to the poet, limited as he is in time and place, because they enable him to complete what has been seen by what is heard; as in Cymbeline we gain a better insight into the circumstances which made this singular wager possible.

HENRY VIII.

In the series of Shakespeare's later works we have met with several observations which seem to betray to us that there were moments in his later years when his mental interest in his own writings declined, perhaps in consequence of physical debility. The unrefreshing character of the ethical subjects of some of the dramas of this latter period, the tardy revision of such a worthless play as Pericles, the æsthetic defects in Antony, the unfinished form of Timon, the mistake as to material and aim in Troilus, all this might indeed prepare us for the time when the poet, having so early discontinued his activity as an actor, would also renounce his vocation as a poet. It has been lately conjectured that we may lay hold, as it were, of this very moment in the production of the historical play of Henry VIII., in which Shakespeare, it is supposed, at the very close of his dramatic career, left his old companions a mere sketch to be carried out in the dramatic celebration of a court festivity, an end which this same historical play must have served even in the last century. The drama, overloaded with pomp and show, is a masque written for some occasion, like the Tempest and the Midsummer Night's Dream. It was formerly believed to have originated on the occasion of the coronation of King James and his Queen Anne (July 24, 1603). The latter opinion to which we refer ('Gentleman's Magazine' 34, 115 *et seq.*) supposes that the marriage of the Princess Elizabeth (February, 1612) was the cause which may have induced Burbadge's company to obtain Shakespeare's groundwork for the play, which they elaborated into this masque, a form for which the poet himself would hardly have designed his historical drama. If the play really came from Shakespeare's hand at this period of his closing dramatic career, it would be a strange sport of fate that this last of his productions should soon, like a sad and

farewell celebration of this event, cause a tragic holocaust. When on June 29, 1613 (according to a notice by Sir Henry Wotton), the play was represented by Burbadge's company under the title of 'All is True,' a title to which the epilogue alludes, the theatre caught fire from the discharge of some small cannons, and the Globe, for so many years the scene of the poet's fame, was burnt to the ground.

A long time ago, Roderick, in Edward's 'Canons of Criticism,' hesitated at some peculiarities in the versification of Henry VIII., but never since then has the genuineness of the play been doubted, and at the most the prologue and epilogue were all that were denied as the work of the poet's pen. Indeed, the strictly logical design of the four main characters suffered no doubt to arise, as no other poet of the time could have sketched their psychological outline with such sharpness, however much assistance the historical sources (Cavendish's 'Life of Wolsey,' as copied in the chronicles), and two previous dramatic works upon Wolsey by Chettle and his companions, might have afforded. In the first place, in the character of the Duke of Buckingham, we look once again upon the age of the great armed nobility, with their pretensions and rebellions, which were the soul of the history under the houses of York and Lancaster, although in our present play the physiognomy of the age appears wholly changed, compared to the character of that earlier epoch. The noise of arms has ceased, the prominent personages are men of education, mind, and well-won merit; the duke himself has kept up with the change of the time; he is not merely an ambitious man of the sword; he is learned, wise in council, rich in mind, and a fascinating orator. Nevertheless, we see him standing in the midst of a number of other nobles, partly related to him, Norfolk, Surrey, Abergavenny, who conspire to maintain the old authority of the nobles, to whom the greatness of the upstart Wolsey is a thorn in their eye, who regard it as insufferable that 'a beggar's book outworths a noble's blood,' that the scarlet robe should assume the importance of their rank, and that difference in persons should be at an end. In proud passion, in the restless haste of personal contempt, Buckingham seeks to lay a snare for the cardinal, and falls himself into the net. He imputed to the priest grasping and treasonous plans; he pried too artfully and overshot his mark; but he himself was not unversed in bold, ambitious projects, which his clever adversary knew how

to turn against him as crimes. He was the next heir to the throne in the Beaufort branch of the Lancastrian house if the king died without issue. As the son of that Buckingham who assisted Richard III. to the throne, and afterwards rebelled against him, he delighted in these remembrances of the history of his house; he plays wantonly with his aspiring thoughts, and speculates upon the lack of a male heir, which caused Henry so much doubt and jealousy; he gains the love of the commonalty, he listens readily to the prophecies of silly prophets, who flatter his dreams of greatness; he expresses himself imprudently once when threatened with imprisonment:—

> If I for this had been committed,
> As, to the Tower, I thought—I would have played
> The part my father meant to act upon
> The usurper Richard; who, being at Salisbury,
> Made suit to come in his presence; which if granted,
> As he made semblance of his duty, would
> Have put his knife into him.

This is stated by his surveyor, bribed by Wolsey, and it brings the man to the scaffold, who erred rather from foolish indiscretion than from actual criminal intentions. When he is fallen, he collects himself after his sentence; he dies composed and noble, forgiving, without hatred, already 'half in heaven,' completely devoid of all pride of rank in that moment which so impressively calls to remembrance the vanity of such distinctions.

In contrast to him stands Wolsey, who, born in a lower rank, had by his own mental power raised himself to the highest positions in the church and state, to the place nearest the king and the Pope. King Henry had indeed inherited his love for this man from his father; he regarded him as one who could not err, and for such a one the cardinal knew how to make himself pass; he overloaded him with benefits and advantages, raised him to the first dignity in the kingdom, and permitted him proudly and imperiously to overlook the highest nobility of the land. Fortune, favour, and merit combined to raise the immoderate ambition of this 'great child of honour,' to advance his pride beyond measure, to quench in him every appearance of restraint and humility, to feed his covetousness and love of pomp, and to spread around him royal splendour. Ambition urges him to strive after ever greater dignities, and greater positions again stir up his ambition into a brighter

flame. The means to his ends become indifferent to him; he has never known truth; dissimulation is his slave, behind which he conceals the malice of his heart; munificence without bounds, advancement and favour, chain his servants inviolably to him; bribery gains over to him the confidants of his enemies, whom he pursues with all the cunning of revenge. Half fox, half wolf, he swallows greedily the treasures of the land, oppresses the commons with enormous taxes, and, when the people rebel, he assumes the appearance of having himself diminished them. With cold arrogance he disregards the blame urged against him on this occasion, and treats it as the envious rancour of the weak and the malicious, who cannot measure his merits. He makes a systematic opposition against the nobles. No peer is uninjured by him; he ruins the class in the mass, when by arbitrary designation of the persons who are to accompany the king to the festive meeting with the King of France, and by the immense splendour which they were to display there, he consumes the fortunes of many families. And when the powerful Buckingham is aimed at, he surrounds him with spies and hirelings, and plans his future fall, while he removes his nearest and most powerful relatives to positions remote from the court. Thus striding with proud head over the highest of the land, he attempts it even with the king. He had become accustomed to rank himself with princes; his servants were audacious enough to declare that their master would sooner be waited on than any other subject, if not than the king; he made use of the formula '*Ego et rex meus*,' when he wrote to foreign courts. To occupy the papal chair, to obtain a rank even superior to his king's, this is the ultimate end of his ambition. He has seized upon the higher ecclesiastical positions in the land; he next strives without the king's knowledge to become the papal legate; it is the Pope himself who stirs up his ambition. To obtain the papacy he imprudently accumulates upon himself the treasures of the country. For this object he tries to bring his king into alliance with France. He has in vain sought the archbishopric of Toledo from the emperor, he must thus rest on his adversary France. To this end that resplendent feast at the meeting of the two kings must be kept in the vale of Arde, and Buckingham and the opponents to this alliance must be put out of the way. This is not yet the extreme point to which his revenge against the emperor and his wish to unite with France drive him.

He undertakes to ruin the queen herself; she is the emperor's aunt, and his enemy moreover already from her character. She has lived twenty years with the king in the happiest concord, but he, taking a wide range as ever, by means of a French ecclesiastic throws out scruples as to the lawfulness of the marriage, and what these cannot effect, the king's sensuality accomplishes. The separation is effected in order that the king, according to the cardinal's intention, may marry the Duchess of Alençon, the French king's sister. If all these aims had been obtained, if Henry VIII. had entered into so close a connection with France, if Wolsey had ascended the papal chair, we may readily believe that he would have played the part towards Henry VIII. which Thomas à Becket in the see of Canterbury acted towards his king, or that under the peaceful influence of this powerful man, who even in his present position fettered the kingdom by his secret dealings, Catholicism would have been anew established in England. But the cardinal had estimated everything except the king's sensual passion. The scruple concerning the legitimacy of his marriage had no sooner been instilled into him, and the prospect of a new marriage presented to him, than he quickly cast his eyes on the beautiful Anne Bullen. His conscience now became urgent, the cardinal's delay was insupportable to him, the hesitation of the papal church irritating; and this is, thus Wolsey subsequently perceives too late, 'the weight that pulled him down.' When having ventured beyond his depth in a sea of glory, when his high-blown pride has broken under him, and he has sunk, he returns to the true value of the man within him; he acknowledges that too much honour is a heavy burden for a man who aspires to Heaven, and he warns Cromwell of the sin of ambition, by which the angels fell. He casts off at once the burden of the world and of sin, he recovers the strength of his soul in poverty, and true happiness in misery, and in an edifying return to true self-knowledge, which the poet, resting on the testimony of history (Campian, 'Hist. of Ireland') bestows upon him, according to which this man of duplicity, severity, and malice was never happy but in his fall, he gains more honour in the hour of his death than by all the pomp of his life.

In the King Henry VIII. the poet had to paint a portrait which must be flattered and must yet be like; he must not shake the moral respect or excite the kingly jealousy of

James I., and yet he would not be untrue to history, which presented to his view a repulsive despotic character, not even indemnified by the fearful magnitude of the crime of a Richard III. Shakespeare portrayed him, without misrepresenting or disguising his cruelty, his sensuality, his caprice, his semi-refinement united with natural coarseness, but he kept them in the background; and there is great field for an actor between the vague generality with which this portrait is sketched, and the few features of complete individual peculiarity which the poet has admitted; and indeed the character of Henry VIII., originally played by Lowin, and from his conception of it transmitted through Davenant to Betterton, has always been a favourite part for the English actor. His dependence upon flatterers, together with his jealous desire to rule alone; the ease with which he is deceived, together with his resentful bitterness when he sees himself deluded, and his deceitful dissimulation in suppressing malice and revenge; his caprice, together with his impetuosity, his unwieldy clumsy appearance, together with a certain mental refinement; his lack of feeling, together with isolated traits of good-nature; his sensuality under the transparent mask of religion and conscience; his manner, condescending even to vulgarity; all these are so many delicate contrasts, in which the player has to hit the fine line of contact. Held in magic fetters by so great a man as Wolsey, surrounded throughout by devoted instruments, and humoured in every wish and every caprice by the most yielding and devoted wife, the king appears as one of the princes who

> kiss obedience,
> So much they love it, but to stubborn spirits
> They swell, and grow as terrible as storms,

and who are implacable when crossed; he is jealous, even to bloody severity, of every threatened self-exaltation in a subject, as in Buckingham. He is the slave of his nature, and of all the passion and self-will which belong to it. This is indeed most generally the source of all tyranny; in Henry VIII. it is at the same time the source of his homely, condescending manner. He does not like to be troubled by any restraint; a ceremonious company of nobles, if it be more than a game with his brother-in-law, would not please him; his ostentatious cardinal would be offensive to him, if his assemblies were less worldly; his companions are for the most part upstarts out of the lower

classes, scholars rather than soldiers, because he was himself trained more in learning than in arms, and was more adroit at a pastoral masque than at a tournament. Throughout, therefore, the king is peaceful, citizen-like, and familiar; he has no hesitation in taking a Cranmer for the godfather of his daughter, all the less so, because it is a mark of disdain towards his distinguished adversaries. For whenever this natural bias for the equalisation of men and the disregard of rank concurs with his provoked self-will and hostile opposition, we observe that the highest authority on earth, the papacy, stands for nothing with him; when it concerns his blind passion, he regards the love of a blameless wife as little as her royal descent, in order to unite himself to a woman of a lower order.

The two female characters between whom Henry is placed betray the same masterly manner of dramatic delineation, although one is a mere sketch. Katharine is a touching model of womanly virtue and gentleness, of conjugal devotion and love, and of Christian patience in defenceless suffering. She is surrounded by the most virtuous company; her enemy is compelled to praise in her a 'disposition gentle' and a 'wisdom o'ertopping woman's power.' She has never done evil, which must seek concealment; she was incapable of calumny and injury. Only when a natural instinct provokes her against an artful intriguer, to whom, while led away by his ambition, virtue is a folly, and when she has to take poor subjects under her protection against oppression, then only does her virtue impart to her a sting, which, however, never transgresses the limits of womanly refinement. She loves her husband 'with that excellence that angels love good men with;' almost bigoted in her love, she dreams of no joy beyond his pleasure; he himself testifies to her that she was never opposed to his wishes, that she was of wife-like government, commanding in obeying; all his caprices she bore with the most saint-like patience. To see herself divorced from him after twenty years of happiness is a load of sorrow which only the noblest of women can bear with dignity and resignation; to descend from the high position of queen is moreover painful to the royal Spaniard. But she is ready to lead a life of seclusion in homely simplicity, and to bless her faithless, cruel husband even to the hour of her death. Her soul had remained beautiful upon the throne, in her outward degradation it was more beautiful still; she goes to the grave reconciled with her true enemy and destroyer. Johnson

has ranked her death scene as above any scene in any other poet; so much was he impressed with its profound effect, unaided by romantic contrivance, and apart from all unnatural bursts of poetic lamentation and the ebullitions of stormy sorrow. *One* womanly weakness the poet (in obedience to history) has imputed to her even to the brink of the grave: even in the hour of death, and after she has indeed seen Heaven open, she clings to the royal honour which belongs to her. The poet indicates in Anne Bullen the counterpart to this weakness. He has portrayed this 'fresh-fish,' the rising queen, only from a distance, he has rather declared than exhibited her beauty, her loveliness, and chastity, her completeness in mind and feature; he does not attempt to enlist us excessively in her favour, when he exhibits her so merry in the society of a Sands; moreover, all place greater stress upon the blessing which is to descend from her than upon herself. The introductory scene makes us believe that she is as free from ambitious views as she asserts; her conversation indeed with the court lady convinces us as little as the former that she could not reconcile herself to splendid honours when they were laid upon her. We see her not as queen, but we see her self-love flattered so far that we can well divine that, raised out of her lowly position, she would play the part of queen as well as Katharine did that of a domestic woman.

No one in this short explanation of the main characters of Henry VIII. will mistake the certain hand of our poet. It is otherwise when we approach closer to the development of the action and attentively consider the poetic diction. The impression of the whole becomes then at once strange and unrefreshing; the mere external threads seem to be lacking which ought to link the actions to each other; the interest of the feelings becomes strangely divided, it is continually drawn into new directions, and is nowhere satisfied. At first it clings to Buckingham and his designs against Wolsey; but with the second act he leaves the stage; then Wolsey attracts our attention in an increased degree, and he too disappears in the third act; in the meanwhile our sympathies are more and more strongly drawn to Katharine, who then likewise leaves the stage in the fourth act; and after we have been thus shattered through four acts by circumstances of a purely tragic character, the fifth act closes with a merry festivity, for which we are in nowise prepared, crowning the king's base passion with victory,

in which we could take no warm interest. In the course of the play, the marriage of the king and Anne Bullen is only casually linked with the person of the cardinal, who seemed outwardly as if he ought to form the connecting central point of the action, and the enmity between Cranmer and Gardiner is not at all related to this; both circumstances again apparently stand in no relation to each other. The birth and christening of Elizabeth follow at the conclusion as a new by-work, linked to the preceding merely by a natural but not æsthetic sequence, and connected with the character of Cranmer only by the christening spoons which the godfather has to give to the infant. And in this same way, as we stumble at the loose development of the action, we become doubtful also of the poetic diction, as soon as we compare it with any other of Shakespeare's plays. The English critic before quoted perceived only in single scenes (Act I. sc. 1, 2; Act II. sc. 3, 4; Act III. sc. 2; Act V. sc. 1, 2) that freshness of life and nature, that perfect freedom from all the conventional language of the stage or of books, those concise expressions, that bold and rapid turn of thought, that impatient activity of mind and imagination, which so perceptibly distinguish Shakespeare's language; and even in these scenes we fancy we can feel a certain gloss of varnish, weakening these peculiarities of Shakespeare's diction; in the remaining parts, where whole scenes appear as unnecessary stop-gaps, there often prevails a languid expression of shallow conversation, which seems in scarcely one trait to remind of Shakespeare, though all the more frequently of Beaumont's and Fletcher's style of writing. Fletcher's rhythmic manner is strikingly conspicuous throughout in these very passages of the play; verses with double endings are much more constant in the whole play than in almost any other of Shakespeare's works; in the parts that appear genuine they stand in the proportion of two weak to seven strong endings, but in the less genuine the proportion is of one to two, or two to three; the spondaic double endings, so characteristic of Fletcher's versification, are met with in many passages consecutively. All these peculiarities determined our English critic in the supposition that the play had been consigned by Shakespeare in a mere sketch to Fletcher, whose influence in the completion of the work would at once explain the want of moral and æsthetic consistency and coherence in the drama.

It is striking, and it seems to us of a deciding importance,

that this result of philological inquiry fully accords with the result of the utterly opposite æsthetical test of the unity of idea in this historical play. Formerly, indeed, I believed that the key to the play might be found in Cranmer's prophetic speech at the christening of Elizabeth, which in broad touches predicts the blessed fruits of the queen's future government: the establishment of peace, the security of Protestantism, and the consideration of merit before birth and blood; and I have thought that the essential idea of the drama might be referred to the glorification of the house of Tudor by an historical abstraction of the main merit and value of the rule of this house. I was induced to admit that the real action, the victory of Protestantism, which the poet had for this aim placed as the central point of his play of Henry VIII., he could not have ventured to represent on the stage in any deep view or detailed treatment; that this might have compelled him (and this history moreover justified) to make the casual outward causes which have had this great result for England the subject of representation in his drama, which in many passages, it seems unintentionally, hints at the experience that great results often arise from the smallest and most unexpected causes. But in this attempt to obtain for the play a unity of idea as its foundation, I have not been able to conceal from myself that, even supposing the justice of such an interpretation, the whole play would evaporate into a formal dramatic spiritualising of the subject. The action represented would in this case be only the symbolic precursor to the real aim of the piece, which would not lie in the central point of the play, but in its conclusion, in that prophesying of a period and a condition, lying far behind the present, in which the scene is placed,—in a speech for which, and for the cause of which, few indeed of the facts of the play had prepared in any tangible manner. It seems, therefore, in every way more just simply to confess the lack of dramatic unity and of an ethical focus in the play, and to explain it in the manner of the considerations we have just alleged.

There are not a few Englishmen who have maintained the co-operation of Shakespeare and Fletcher upon another work

also. We mentioned before a small series of doubtful dramas which were printed partly under Shakespeare's name, and which, in Germany especially, were considered to be youthful works, if not, indeed, masterpieces from our poet's pen. This doubt has been long ago laid aside in England. With regard alone to the 'Two Noble Kinsmen,' which appeared in 1634, under the joint names of Shakespeare and Fletcher, men such as Spalding, Coleridge, Dyce, and Ingleby are of opinion that no inconsiderable part of the play could have been composed by no other than by Shakespeare alone. According to Dyce's ('Works of Beaumont and Fletcher,' 1, lxxx. *et seq.*) view of the matter, Shakespeare's share in the play to a certain extent might be readily allowed and yet again wholly denied. Nothing is more probable than that Shakespeare, being in the pay of his theatre, was compelled to appropriate foreign plays for representation by a remodelling of even a lighter kind than we perceive in Titus and Pericles. Nothing would be more possible than that he may have adapted in this manner (according to Dyce's opinion) an older play of the same purport as that of the 'Two Noble Kinsmen,' which was performed in 1594 at the Newington Theatre, and that subsequently Fletcher, making use of Shakespeare's additions, may have remodelled this same older piece into the form in which it stands in the editions of his works. But that Shakespeare ever could have taken a hearty interest in this subject is to be denied with the greatest certainty from one single consideration; for never have his sound ethics had to do with such conventional points of honour in the style of the dramatic Romanticists of Spain as those upon which the relation between Palamon and Arcitas, the two noble cousins (the central point of the whole play), turns. And grounds just as decisive might readily withhold us from even attempting to divine Shakespeare's outward share in this work, the labour of so many hands. His pen has generally been perceived most distinctly in such scenes as consist essentially in narrative and description; even Dyce, among the passages which appeared to him to be indisputably Shakespearian, has selected one which is purely descriptive, for the sake of description itself; but in Shakespeare's whole dramas, with scarcely the exception *of one single* instance, this very manner of description is never and nowhere to be found. We are, therefore, of Staunton's opinion, who is as little inclined to impute to

Shakespeare a share in this as in any other of the plays falsely awarded to him. It seems a settled matter that the great man wrote no more for the stage after his return to Stratford in 1612. With the Winter's Tale and the Tempest he closed his great career, and buried fathom-deep, like Prospero, his poetic wand. Happy the successor who may one day again dig up this treasure!

SHAKESPEARE.

Now that we have studied Shakespeare's works in succession, and scanned the separate features one by one, it remains for us to take a retrospective view, and to contemplate as a whole the portrait of the poet and his poetry.

The points of view from which this many-sided poet, his gifts, his character and his art, may be studied are countless; endless is the material out of which the threads of such a universal examination may be spun. These threads are even immeasurable in extent if we consider alone all the striking things which have been already said by intelligent judges of Shakespeare. In this matter it is difficult to be both new and brief. But the more difficult it is, so much the more is it incumbent upon us to limit ourselves to a few well-chosen and profitable points of consideration.

The points of view from which *we* intend to make our observations have been already mentioned in the introduction to this work. We there decided that, both from an artistic and a moral point of view, the highest honour that could be conferred upon a poet was the prerogative of Shakespeare.

Firstly, That in the range of modern dramatic poetry he occupies the place of the revealing genius of this branch of art and of its laws, as Homer does in the history of epic poetry; and

Secondly, That, as the rarest judge of men and human affairs, he is a teacher of indisputable authority, and the most worthy to be chosen as a guide through the world and through life.

These two positions are the basis of the following remarks, and we shall endeavour continually to return to them.

High as the recognition of Shakespeare's poetic genius has

lately risen, it will yet appear extremely paradoxical to many if by the side of Homer, whose fame has now for nearly 3,000 years survived all changes of taste, we rank a poet scarcely known to the races of the Latin tongue, to half the civilised world, concerning whom opinion in the course of three centuries has so greatly changed, and even now is so divided among the English themselves. As in Johnson's time the opinion was held that Shakespeare often did not know his own intention, and that he owed his greatest beauties to mere lucky hits, so in the present day Birch and Courtenay, undeterred by the indication of deep contrivance in his dramas, deny all fixed plan in Shakespeare's works, and have even doubted if he ever designedly made his personages speak in accordance with their characters. They have solemnly protested against the worship of his genius, and thought it blasphemy in Coleridge to call him superhuman. *Tastelessness*, or want of the sense of beauty; *irregularity*, or want of a spirit of arrangement; the realistic drawing from nature in his works, or the *want of artistic ideality*, were formerly and are still the standing objections urged against Shakespeare, as if deficiency in these necessary qualities, without which a real disciple of art cannot be imagined, were a matter of course in a poet, who, as an actor, lived for the multitude and for their vulgar fancies, and wrote in a rude and uncultivated age. We will go over all these points in succession, since, if a defence be not required, an explanation is at least necessary.

First, as concerns our poet's sense of beauty, we will not deny that we ourselves have found marks of a perverted and uncultivated taste in his indelicacies, in his laboured play upon words, and odd conceits, or in the cutting off of heads and putting out of eyes on the stage, or in his strange anachronisms; also in the number and style of metaphorical images which characterise Shakespeare's poetical conversations. One general remark in reference to these must precede all other explanations. These censures universally refer only to isolated scenes, or to the 'outward parts' of style and diction, and though we have neither concealed nor excused errors of this kind, yet, looking upon them as exceptions and trifles, we have upon principle not laid more stress upon them than was due with reference to so great a whole. All beauty depends upon symmetry and proportion. An overgrowth, which sucks out the strength of a flowering plant and destroys its shape, may be in

the oak the harmless sport of exuberance, and even an ornament to its form; bushes which would be a wilderness in a garden may enhance the beauty of the grander scenes of nature. Irregularity, when isolated and taken out of its place, will always be ugly, while in its proper connection it may add to the charm by variety. Those good men of Polonius' school, who cannot see beyond their beards, who never get beyond such particular details as 'that is a foolish figure;' 'that's an ill phrase, a vile phrase;' 'that's good, this is too long;' such as these Hamlet sends 'to the barber's with their beards' and their art criticisms; they are out of place with such a poet as Shakespeare. All the experience we have gained warns us against following their steps. The whole history of Shakespearian criticism for the last century is nothing but the discovery of the mistakes of those who for a century before thought to have discovered the faults of the poet. If for the next century we would only see Shakespeare acted, instead of reading him alone as we have hitherto done, perhaps all that appeared to us unsuitable would stand forth, if not as beauties of art, yet as truths of nature. For numbers of the errors of taste in Shakespeare have turned out to be striking touches of character; the æsthetic deformities imputed to Shakespeare's poetry proved the moral deformities of certain of his characters, and what had been denounced as a fault was found to be an excellence.

Thus it is almost everywhere with those obscenities and naive expressions, with that forced wit and those conceits, and that enigmatical depth of speech and expression. In single instances among his early works many disfigurements of this kind cannot perhaps be justified. But we must not suffer ourselves to be disgusted with the poet on this account any more than with Homer for the naive epithets at which the refined age smiles. To lay aside the exterior garb of the time in speech and manners is beyond any man's power. We know with what coarseness, not long before Shakespeare, the most learned priests entered into controversy, and the greatest man of the age exchanged writings with the English king! We know that noble ladies of those times far exceeded in indecency of language what the poet puts into the mouth of his boldest characters. We know that burlesque wit was then common property and the general taste of society in popular literature. We know that those conceits were naturalised, through the master of Italian art, in the highest court circles

and among the learned. It is, therefore, *no* wonder that in Shakespeare's Italianising period we can collect a number of these strange conceits; it *is* rather a wonder that he was the first to give a shock to this affectation of poetical diction by the use of a healthy popular language; and this very naturalness of expression has not a little contributed to raise the poetic estimation of Shakespeare among the Teutonic nations with their increasing feeling for nature and beauty. It was a wonder that Shakespeare was so soon able so far to rise above the indecencies of his dramatic contemporaries and the bad taste of the Italian court style, that in his works the mean and absurd is never inserted for its own sake, that in his riper plays the freedoms and follies of language are confined to the tongues and circumstances to which they are natural. It is only a certain class of women in whom he permits great freedom of speech, and Johnson never said anything more untrue than that 'neither his gentlemen nor his ladies have much delicacy, nor are sufficiently distinguishable from his clowns by any appearance of refined manners.' It is only a certain class of men who indulge in witticisms and puns; and if it has been said of the poet, that a quibble was a will o' the wisp, which always led him into the marsh, it is true of his witlings, but not of himself, nor of any of those who with him call those people fools who 'defy the matter for a tricksy word.' No indelicate expressions, no trifling witticisms, can be pointed out in Antonio and Posthumus, Brutus and Cassius, Coriolanus and Othello, or any of his earnest and active heroes; the witty among them condescend sometimes to the wanton conversation of their more daring friends, others are so inaccessible to it that even a third person dare not attempt it in their presence. And just so the conceits, the obscurities, and extravagances of language are always in characteristic places. Where confused thoughts oppose, cross, and perplex each other, it is because the thinking powers of the speaker are themselves lame or dull; where the meaning struggles for expression, it is because the speaker hovers over the abyss of mental excitement, in which the plummet of reason can find no firm ground; where the verse is heavy and the figure grand, the sense will be weighty, and rarely is it that, as in the descriptive poems, great words are wasted on small thoughts, deep thought on shallow subjects, swelling figures on mean things, or that the harmony between matter and expres-

sion is injured. The accomplished actor would be able to avail himself of all these peculiarities of manner, for the purposes of characterisation, to a much greater extent than would be thought possible by the reader; we can only suggest this mode of consideration; to carry it out in detail would be the task of an intelligent commentator, and it *is* essentially the task of the actor. This way of accounting for these peculiarities must be the apology for them, even when they are, in themselves, repulsive to taste; for where the choice lies between taste and truth, Homer would not have hesitated any more than Shakespeare. Those, however, who from a childish nicety would find fault with the truth of nature, the poet would have set to rights as Bacon did the fastidious persons who turned away from what was naked and ugly in natural science: testifying that the sun of art shines on the cloaca as well as the palace without being soiled by it, that what *is* worthy of existence may also be worthy of art, and that the stage is not an

the audience for which he wrote, we must compare it with that in which Lope de Vega, a great popular favourite, stood in reference to his public, in a similarly flourishing period of the Spanish theatre. There indeed the theatre was a sort of coterie, thoroughly unlike the free competition and artistic rivalry of the more refined London stage. There the theatre of the small new metropolis did not rise above that of a provincial town; the populace and the women governed the stage, rough artisans settled the applause and the disapprobation, and ruled art as the gallery of the Parliament rules politics. But such was not the public to which the prologue in Henry VIII. appeals; such a public he despised, and chastised with hard strokes. Lope de Vega, on the contrary, was an orator for such hearers; he imputed it to this very tribunal that he had returned to the rude fashion of magic pieces, and to barbarisms, which he himself called monsters; he confessed that he had written in contempt of the classics and of reason. But never would Shakespeare have made such a confession: he lived for the patrons of art of his acquaintance; he wrote for great actors; emulating nature he grasped the loftiest conceptions of art, and promised to his verse immortality and future fame.

Among Shakespeare's faults of taste have been placed also his mistakes in the delineation of different ages. Even here he is judged by isolated instances. It is true he has put the names of Roman gods in the mouths of the Druids of Britain, and given to the Romans bells; he has intermixed the features of the heroic and feudal ages, and described battles with cannon in King John's time, because the people desired to see the English army on the stage as it was in their own day. Thus far he conformed to the views of the people. This did not necessarily represent his own view; he comprehended the requirements of dramatic effect, which even Goethe and Schiller durst not disregard. He gave to the times he depicted the features of that actually present, by which alone the matter could reach the heart. But however severely we may criticise these single errors, none of them can be compared in bad taste with Raphael making Apollo play the fiddle on Parnassus, and yet Raphael is the painter of the finest taste in the world! But, what is more, these mistakes are never in essentials; Shakespeare has never given to other times and places the intellectual features of his own time, and thereby rendered their nature unrecognisable; he has never done like Lope and

Calderon, who modernised all past times and made every people Spanish; he has never, like Corneille and Racine, travestied antiquity and the middle ages in their Gallic classicism; he has never intrinsically missed the spirit of the time as was done by that master of historic accommodation, our own Goethe, in the Achilleis. On the contrary, there was *first* manifested in this first of the pure Teutonic poets of modern times that many-sidedness and susceptibility which are peculiar to the German race, and that objectivity which in apprehending times and subjects artistically always yields them their rights; a gift which Handel, at a later period, in his oratorios, was again the first to preserve, and which descended from him into our poetry, through Klopstock, Herder, and Goethe. In his English and Roman, his mediæval and heroic pieces, Shakespeare has always preserved the intrinsic character of the times, as truly as that of those individuals of his own age and nation whose thoughts he thinks and whose language he speaks. And this is all the more remarkable, the stronger the individualism of the poet, whom we recognise, as we do Handel, in every single passage, and who, nevertheless, in the main entirely disappears before the subject he is treating.

Finally, many complaints have been made of Shakespeare's use of metaphorical images, of their impropriety, their confusion, or their excessive accumulation. It may be said the excuse of the object of characterisation is not applicable here; they are characteristic of Shakespeare, not of his personages. It is more correct to say that this is the characteristic of all poetry: it is the only means poetry possesses of transforming the thought, the instrument of the understanding, into an image, and of making it the instrument of the imagination. Aristotle has styled metaphor the chief ornament of composition and the unteachable work of poetic genius, and to try the taste of our poet by this test is truly not a demand that need be avoided. We ourselves have mentioned some false metaphors in Shakespeare's early works (in Henry VI.); in his later pieces we should seek for them in vain. The man who expresses himself by the mouth of his Lavatch as so easily affected by every 'stinking metaphor,' need not fear in this respect the finest nose. We have only to prove this by calculating, and we shall find a hundred fragrant flowers of metaphor for one scentless flower; a thousand for one narcotic. The *complication* and joining together of contradictory metaphors

has also been found fault with. But the cases will be rare in which Shakespeare has repeated that fault in Hamlet's soliloquy, if it be a fault, where in one sentence he speaks of a *sea* of troubles against which one takes up *arms*; yet even by such disparate images the meaning is not confused, but rather made clearer, For thought and image are usually so completely in harmony and so remarkably interwoven in Shakespeare, that, by dropping the image, the significance of the thought would also be lost. Dryden remarks that by melting many of his metaphors, silver would remain in the crucible; but we think, on the other hand, the gold would have evaporated. With more plausibility the *accumulation* of the metaphors might be objected to. No rule is more correct than the old one of Aristotle, that in the use of metaphorical language moderation is to be observed, that there should not be too many enigmas, and that the weight of the single images should not oppress nor destroy the sense of the whole. But the question is here whether *we* as critics have the greater taste, or Shakespeare as a poet. We are too much accustomed to a low strain of dramatic eloquence by the rhymed prose of the French drama, and even of our greatest German poets. An expression such as that of Goethe's, which we find in Tasso, 'We have nothing with which we may compare it,' would have been regarded by Shakespeare as a declaration of poetic bankruptcy. We cannot agree with Dryden, who, comparing our poet with the simple dialogue of the ancients, thought his compositions savoured too much of the buskin. Among the ancients the buskin in itself, the mask, the heroic characters, the whole matter and its representation, and the pompous style of the chorus, raised the spectators far above the level of common nature, and if the ground of reality were not to be entirely lost, it was necessary to keep the dialogue as simple as possible. But in Shakespeare, who had not the old mythic heroes for subjects, who made a law for himself never to forsake actual nature in his subjects and characters—in Shakespeare it was a master-stroke of poetical instinct that he elevated his style, not indeed to the poetic brilliancy of the ode, but yet above the calm flow of the epos, and that in the choicest language he reminded his hearers every minute that his play represented reality, but was not reality.

If, however, we would truly make proof of the poet's taste, we must penetrate through all this exterior, which we may call

the clothing or body of art, to its real soul. Then, even if we cling to single passages, we shall still meet everywhere with a degree of æsthetic and moral refinement, to which, in the more polished times after Shakespeare, but very few poets attained. Hear him, as a critic, pronounce those rules of art in Hamlet, and tell us who could have thought on the subject with more refinement! Consider him as a lyric poet in the three forms he has introduced in Romeo, and show us a piece more spirited and tasteful in this style! Try his knowledge of human nature in the progress he has made in the estimate of women, and show us one to be compared with him in delicate knowledge of the sex! Advance from thence to his delineation of the manly character, and count among the most delicately organised, even amongst women, those who could but imitate, or even find out the delicate line of distinction between false and true heroism in Coriolanus! Try the characters, the actions, the sentences, the whole range of thought in his works; in this grand code of life, pictures, and wisdom nothing is trivial, scarcely anything is to be called antiquated in the lapse of these 300 years;—and endeavour to conceive the purport of this sentence! Or trace the peculiar dramatic activity of his mind. Name to us the poet who approached and managed his sources with such fine feeling as Shakespeare has! Compare with the painful uncertainty with which Goethe was often conscious of having mischosen his materials, the bold security with which Shakespeare seizes the most intricate and manages the most intractable matter, the bold security with which he ventures and accomplishes what no other would have begun, and elicits beauties out of materials that in other hands would be revolting! Observe the happy instinct with which, as if he had been schooled by a Lessing, he avoided in his dramas all the descriptive matter with which a Calderon systematically disfigured his works, whilst the isolated description of Queen Mab makes us immediately sensible how foreign to Shakespeare is this kind of poetic ornament! Or observe his use of the marvellous, and show us the modern poet who, with such artistic skill as he, clothed such deep symbolism in such a plastic form! Whoever has weighed these separate sides will see the folly of supposing that the man who appears so refined in everything great and real should have missed the little and the external like an idiot, and not rather have despised them as a genius; and he will cast back the reproach of being para-

doxical on the petty critics, who destroy our enjoyment of the poet by their trivial censures. All the objections we have mentioned vanish however into insignificance when, for the sake of arriving at a right judgment of Shakespeare's taste, we examine the whole structure and organisation of his works of art. On this point, and on the higher question concerning Shakespeare's art-ideal, we must refer the question to his sense of beauty, if we would have it effectually answered.

One reproach, which affects not single parts alone, but the whole of Shakespeare's art, and which if well-founded would be more dangerous to our parallel between Shakespeare and Homer, is the assumed *carelessness* of the dramatist to *laws and rules*. If it be impossible to be a true artist without taste, it is still less possible without attention to laws to be the revealing, *i.e.*, the law-giving genius of any particular province of art, such as we claim Shakespeare to be.

Our whole consideration of Shakespeare has been designed throughout to prove unity and regularity of art arrangement in the separate plays. We began by asserting that our poet complied in a new manner with the artistic demand of the oldest æsthetics, that his art agreed perfectly with that essential law of Aristotle, which all ages, and lastly our great German poets in rare harmony, have acknowledged to be ever binding, that it only claims spiritualisation and enlargement of this law, such as is suitable to the changed nature of the times and the materials for poetry. We will now endeavour to collect together the results of this examination, to prove that these have not been vague assertions.

The most obvious difference between the ancient and the modern drama is its less and greater extension. The poly-mythic dramas of antiquity met with no cultivation: tragedy received its purest form in the hands of the poets, who limited it to one single action, and this again to its main point, the catastrophe. This manner of proceeding we explained on formal and material grounds. The ancient drama arose beside the perfect Homeric epos; it would have been difficult to rival this in the richness of extended actions; the opposite of this action, condensed as much as possible, was therefore aimed at. The materials with which ancient poetry wrought, still further

required this method. The history of the world was still young and brief, the heroic myths were soon exhausted; tragic writers, therefore, were obliged to handle the same materials; it was impossible for them to please by novelty of subject; their merit lay in perfecting the form; this led to limiting the action to one chief point, and to striving to manifest their art by drawing their utmost from this one dramatic moment. It was thus that ancient tragedy received its narrow, uniform, stereotyped form. But what still better explains the limitation of the action within these narrow bounds was the great simplicity of the men of heroic times, represented in their tragedies, whose nature, more physically strong than spiritually rich, did not require a deep fulness of characterisation. As soon as the sphere of history became enlarged, as soon as a war like the Peloponnesian and the opposition of schools of philosophy unfolded the many styles of human character, there arose in the tragedies of Euripides, and still more in the comedies, which took the existing world for their subject, the need of more action, motive, and character, and consequently of greater expansion.

All this, which caused the simple form of the old drama, turned completely round in modern times, and naturally produced the very opposite effect. Two thousand years lie between Shakespeare and the flourishing period of the ancient tragedy. In this interval Christianity laid open unknown depths of mind; the Teutonic race in their dispersion filled wide spaces of the earth, the crusades opened the way to the East, later voyages of discovery revealed the West and the whole form of the globe, new spheres of knowledge presented themselves, whole nations and periods of time arose and passed away, a thousand forms of public and private, of religious and political life had come and gone, the circle of views, ideas, experiences, and interests was immensely enlarged, the mind thereby was made deeper and more expanded, wants increased, passions became multiplied and refined, the conflict of human endeavours more numerous and intricate, the resources of the mind immeasurable, and all this in a manner totally foreign to the childish times of antiquity. This abundance of external and internal material streamed into the sphere of art on all sides; poetry could not resist it without injury and even ruin. The epos of the middle ages strove to seize on this abundance of matter for itself. But it was far from having the advantages

of the Homeric poem, whose historic ground was the well-known Trojan war, the shattering of a world, but a small and comprehensive one. The epos of the Germans and French on the contrary, being undertaken in uncivilised times, and with immense matter, remained unformed and undeveloped. Poetry first received a more artistic form in Italy, when music, painting, and architecture arose; at this time the drama was recognised throughout Europe as the poetic form most suitable to modern times and races; the epos no longer found rhapsodists and hearers, for amid the more active pursuits of life men required to be attracted to art by stronger allurements. As the drama occupied the *place* of the epic poem, and did not merely, like the ancient drama, stand *side by side* with it, it inherited, with the office of replacing it, the task of showing itself capable of managing, like the epopee, any matter however extended. The materials presented to it were not common property, like the many well-known myths of antiquity, handed down in a ready-made poetical form; but they were those rudiments of the religious dramas, those mysteries founded on vast actions, those romances and ballads which called forth those epic dramas in the style of Pericles, they were those historical subjects which even before Shakespeare's time demanded a whole cycle of pieces for the mastering of the huge material. To avoid this mass of material never entered the mind of either Hans Sachs, Lope de Vega, or Marlowe. Each of these in his own way amplified the drama in accordance with his comprehensive matter into more comprehensive forms. The things of the world had become complicated and manifold; the variety of men, their nature, their passions, their situations, their mutually contending powers, would not submit, when dramatically represented, to be limited to a simple catastrophe; a wider horizon must be drawn, the actions must be represented throughout their course, the motives of action must be more deeply searched for; art received the office of confining the utmost fulness of matter within a corresponding form, the extension of which, according to Aristotle's law, must however not exclude an easy survey.

The economy of the Greek drama was by no means the only result of the application of Aristotle's law. Aristotle himself was very far from setting up the form and extent of the dramas of his day as a rule for all time. He declared distinctly that the compass of the drama must be regulated by habit and taste.

It even appears that the shortness of the ancient tragedy was not in his opinion its advantage. He knew well that the richness of episodes gave rather a superiority to the epos, and that it was the fault of the uniform and monotonous structure of the tragedy if it wearied or failed. He, therefore, enjoined for the drama, not the compass then *in use*, but the *natural* extent prescribed by the action itself. 'The space,' he says, 'in which, in a string of events, the change from fortune to misfortune or the reverse can, by necessity or probability, take place, this space gives the proper limit to the drama.' If in this sentence the practice of modern play-writers receives its justification, still more does it in what follows. 'As concerns the natural limit of the action, the more extended will prove always the more beautiful, so long as it is easily surveyed.' Shakespeare's practice is exactly correspondent to this rule. In Antony alone he seems to have transgressed this law of an easy survey. Whoever knows Shakespeare's plays by their performance will make this complaint of no other. But with this rule before his eyes, Shakespeare always went to the very verge of these limits. He chose his matter as rich and full as possible, he extended its form according to its requirements, but no further; it will never be found in any of his dramas that the thought is exhausted before the end, that there is any superfluous expansion in the form, or any needless abundance in the matter; it has never yet been shown that even a Schiller or a Goethe could have given his plays a more compressed form without injuring the purport. For the task of arranging the most extensive materials possible in the most extended form, without overstepping its fair proportions, is one which no one has accomplished as Shakespeare has done. Therein lies a great part of his æsthetic greatness. No poet in the same space has represented so much with so little: none has so widely expanded this space within the given poetical form. In this Shakespeare did not suffer himself to be perplexed by the example of the ancient tragedy. He felt that the peculiar poetic material of the new world would perish in these old forms, and therefore it was better to mould them afresh. He knew with certainty (and no æsthetics will ever get further) that the task of the poet was to represent the very substance of his times, to reflect the age in his poetry, and to give it form and stamp; he created, therefore, for the enlarged sphere of life, an enlarged sphere

of art; he sought for this purpose, not a ready-made rule, but the inner law of the given matter, a spirit in the things, which in the formation of the work of art fashioned itself like a crystal into beautiful shapes. For there is no higher worth in a poetical work than the agreement of the form with the nature of the subject represented, according to its own indwelling laws, not according to external rule. If we judge Shakespeare or Homer by the supposition of such a conventional rule, we may equally deny them taste and law; measured, however, by the higher standard, Shakespeare's conformity to an inner law oustrips all those regular dramatists, who learned from Aristotle, not the spirit of regularity, but mechanical imitation.

The most essential law which Aristotle has prescribed to the drama is unity of action. As to the famous unity of time and place, the first is not mentioned at all, the latter only as a custom. Indeed, they are by no means observed throughout the ancient dramas. We know that in Ajax, and in the Eumenides, the place changes, that the limitation of time to one day has been overstepped by Sophocles, by Euripides, and also by Æschylus, whose Agamemnon returns from Troy with telegraphic speed. But above all it is in the comedies of Aristophanes that free play has been made with time and place, notwithstanding the presence of the chorus, which has often been considered the cause of unity of time and place. Its use in ancient tragedy is rather to be explained simply by the limitation of the dramatic action to the catastrophe; it belongs to the very idea of a catastrophe that it is limited to a definite and short time. The modern drama, on the other hand, which describes the complete course of the action, could not without a striking departure from nature be limited to one place and to a short time: this must have been made very evident in our closing remarks on the Winter's Tale. Those who require unity of time in the drama must also for the sake of consistency require the natural size in painting. But as little as reducing the size destroys the illusion in painting, does lengthening the time in the drama. Even the oldest of critics, such as Gildon, have allowed this, and Johnson has strongly defended Shakespeare's procedure in this respect. Yet these men were terrified then at their own boldness. They ventured not to take the side of their feelings against their understanding; they had not moreover the opportunity of comparing and measuring

the worth of the irregular plays of Shakespeare, and that of the curtailed dramas of the French Aristotelian school, by *their effect* and fate in the history of literature: the one appearing as show-pieces for the moment, but the others receiving an historical development, which seems to be rather at its beginning than at its end. For us, who in the present day can take a wider survey of this, the question of place and time is wholly obsolete.[1]

The unity of action, on the other hand, is an ever-binding law. The action of a drama, according to Aristotle, should be one and undivided, so that none of its parts could be transposed or omitted without injuring or destroying the whole; for that which by its presence or absence conduces nothing to the illustration of the whole is no (necessary) part of that whole. This law is so natural, that even the commonest stage pieces adhere to it; their regularity arises out of timid habit, and bears the character of triviality and poverty. Where the drama, in its beginnings especially, attempted more, it has in this respect sinned more. Numberless pieces of Shakespeare's Spanish and English contemporaries do not stand before this law. In the first part of Shakespeare's Henry VI. we pointed out one of those plays, which Aristotle calls episodical, and which he places in the lowest rank; in Pericles one, where the false unity of person stands in the stead of unity of action; in the last two parts of Henry VI., plays where unity cannot be reduced to Aristotle's rule. In his riper works, on the contrary, where the action is only one, the whole arrangement is in unity, according to the directions of Aristotle; we can remove small portions, as in an organic body, without injury, but cannot take away large members without disfiguring the whole. And not in this unity only, but also in the entirety of the action, its progress and management, Shakespeare has hit upon the right method in his practice, as Aristotle, with fortunate judgment, has in his criticism. Aristotle's maxims respecting the complication and extrication of the action are as finely applicable to the richest composition of Shakespeare as to the simplest plays

[1] We should not have brought forward this question again here, had not the discovery of a law, said to have been observed by Shakespeare in reference to the unity of time, been announced with great stress in a paper in *Blackwood's Magazine*, and in an essay by N. J. Halpin on the dramatic unities of Shakespeare. The matter follows entirely the direction of our closing remarks on the Winter's Tale, and we lay no greater weight on it than is laid there.

of antiquity. Everything that happens within or beyond the tragedy, until the approach of the change of fortune, is complication; all that comes after this middle point is the solution, the *dénouement.* Among the ancients the catastrophe is the middle point, the chief matter; the conclusion is commonly given in narration, the complicating circumstance lies very much behind the scene. The opposite practice of the modern drama, which places all the antecedents of the action within the play, increases considerably the difficulty of the author's theme, which requires that the line of the action should be drawn, as it were, in the form of a regular arch; that its rise and fall, its complication and development, should stand in symmetrical proportion; that the catastrophe, the moment when the change of fortune happens, should be at once the centre and zenith of the action. If we apply this touch-stone, the most delicate scale of taste and regularity, to Shakespeare, and at the same time to the greatest dramatists of later times, we shall see at once how much the regular and cultivated might have learned from the so-called irregular barbarian. In Othello the words which express that his happiness is at its height (excellent wretch, &c., Act III. sc. 3) stand in the exact centre of the piece. In Hamlet the turning point of character coincides with the death of Polonius, which happens in the middle of the piece. In Macbeth the death of Banquo is the turning point of his fortune, when his fatal 'security' manifests itself; the ghost appears to Macbeth exactly in the middle of the piece. In Lear everything is at its height on the outbreak of his despair, in the centre of the drama. So in King John, at the murder of Arthur; in Richard II., at his despair of himself. At such moments, in these and other plays, even the passages may be alleged where, as if in order to indicate the very centre of the piece, the catastrophe is pointed out in express words. Whoever will follow out the examination of the different plays, in accordance with these suggestions, will find everywhere the circular line of the action drawn with an enviable certainty, and this observation will perhaps surprise even the most careful reader by revealing hidden beauties and artistic symmetry of design.

Nevertheless, we have found, contrary to this law of the unity of action, a number of Shakespeare's plays containing a two-fold action; so that in them there is either no unity of action, or another law of unity must be found than Aristotle's. We have already pointed out this other law in individual pieces;

we will in this place, without losing ourselves in æsthetic theories, try to explain *why* Shakespeare did not so much forsake as enlarge the Aristotelian law of unity, and why it was *necessary* either to forsake or enlarge it.

The danger of the ancient drama was its uniformity; of that Aristotle was himself conscious. He therefore gave a preference to complicated myths; he wished that the properties of the different kinds of tragedy, which he instanced (the complicated and the simple, the pathetic and the ethic), should be always combined as much as possible: and in this desire also he wrote the law more for the modern drama than for the ancient. The simple, pathetic, or ethic drama, where, as in Ajax and Philoctetes, there is rather the development of a character than of an action, could not please so much as the complicated myth, in which the main ingredients were sudden changes of fortune, recognitions and discoveries, the external complications of events rather than the internal passions and guilt of the characters—ingredients which Aristotle considered, therefore, to be integral parts of tragedy. This kind received thereby somewhat of the character of intrigue pieces, in which naturally the chief weight lies upon the action. Hence it is that Aristotle calls the putting together of the action the most important point in tragedy. 'For,' says he, 'tragedy is not an imitation of men, but of actions and of life, of happiness and misfortune. For even the happiness lies in the actions; and the aim of tragedy is an action, not a particular condition of men. These receive their particular condition by their character, but their good fortune, or the reverse, by their actions. They do not, therefore, act to exhibit their characters, but they develop their characters only by their actions. So that action and plot is the aim of tragedy. And the aim is the chief in everything. Without action there could be no tragedy, but without characters there could. And the tragedies of most moderns *are* without characters. The chief thing, therefore, and, as it were, the soul of tragedy, is the action, the second the characters. It is the same in painting. For if a man produced a daub with the most splendid colouring, he would not please so much as he who drew a picture with only white chalk.'

These propositions go directly to the root of the difference between the old and the new drama, and penetrate to its inmost foundations.

In the wholly different circumstances of civilisation in modern times, we consider the separation of action and character in life itself as impossible as in art would be the assertion that a tragedy could exist without characters, but not without action. The threads out of which actions are formed, amid the working together of nature and disposition, instinct and sentiment, unknown impulse and known intention, actions which react upon changes in the actor's modes of thought and feeling, which again call forth other changed actions—these threads, like warp and woof, run so closely into one web, that we cannot say of any one thing, it is the chief, that we cannot take out one part without the rest falling to pieces. Character and action, as in nature, penetrate each other so completely in Shakespeare's art, which is so true to nature, that between the value and importance of both there is in all his plays the closest connection. If the characters are rough, as in the Taming of the Shrew, or superficial, as in the Midsummer Night's Dream, so will the actions be harsh in one instance and marrowless in the other. The deeds in Lear are not more cruel than the characters are wild, the misunderstandings between Othello and Desdemona not more unhappy than their ignorance of themselves. How little character and action can be separated is best proved when we reverse the maxim that tragedy is possible without characters, but not without action; it is then alike true and false as before. In every dramatic action there must appear a sort of characterisation, however weak; and again, no character could be dramatically developed without action. There may be a disproportion between a lively action and feeble characters which carry it on, or between strongly-drawn characters and a meaner action which takes place amongst them. If we were obliged to choose between the two disproportions, we should undoubtedly, nowadays, choose differently from Aristotle, and, perhaps, the north differently from the south. The comparison Aristotle borrowed from painting does not fit the point; the contraposition which he should have chosen is this—whether a succession of characteristic portraits without action would please better than an historical picture, an action without expression in the actors. To apply this to the drama, the question is, which would deserve the preference—a character piece with little action, like Lessing's 'Nathan,' or the best intrigue piece of the Spanish stage without much distinction in the form of

character? The Teutonic taste would unhesitatingly choose the first. If, then, we were *obliged* to admit a separation between character and action, we should rather call character the most important to the drama, because it is the source of action. However, we will as little call Aristotle's æsthetic view a mistake, as Shakespeare's opposite practice. There is truth and right judgment on both sides when we take into consideration the nature of the times. Among the ancients the description of characters was in fact the least essential. The heroes of old tragedy act without much intellectual impulse, and without a conscious aim; they execute flagitious deeds without reflection, and if, after the deed, the Erinnys awakes the conscience, even then there is little consciousness perceptible in them; a determinate aim and principle of action from innate disposition of mind had no place among those races of mankind. Hence they could introduce masks on the stage, by means of which one main expression governed the countenance of the actor, either because it was intended in a grand style of art to prevent the one chief impression from being disturbed by petty passing emotions, by the light play of passion, or by individual features, or because the inner nature of man did not yet lie so open as that one could know its deeper recesses. We moderns, however, who through long descended tradition and extended intercourse have gradually become cognisant of the great outlines of human nature, are disposed to penetrate into the secret emotions of the heart, and into the more delicate distinctions of character; we spy, therefore, into the hidden play of passion, and desire to search out its expression even in concealment; we abandon the grand harmonious plastic effect of the old drama, where the form and features of the actor received, by means of mask and buskin, a conformity of style, as it were, with the architecture, and with it made one common impression of typical solidity. This effect, then, we abandon for the sake of surpassing the old drama in psychological fulness and depth, in multiplicity and variety of action and character. With us, among whom intention influences our earliest actions, among whom the natural force of inclination is governed by intellectual cultivation, among whom the machinery is prepared from the first that sets every deed in motion by mental levers, among whom great passions must overcome the pressure of conventionality, among whom the origin of an action is more remarkable than the action itself, and the *origin* of a character

more remarkable than all—with us no one would have ventured to make the catastrophe the chief point of a dramatic action, nor the action itself the chief thing in the drama, but if we must separate them the character must have this place. The origin, the growth of characters and actions, of actions by characters, has therefore become, with Shakespeare, the essential task. Hence with him the character easily appears preponderant over the action. We have found this particularly striking wherever Shakespeare has to handle traditional fictions of the most extravagant kind.

The ancients possessed those beautiful myths, which Aristotle recommended them to respect in their main substance, but they did not adhere to the finest of them in their tragedies so faithfully as Shakespeare did to the strange traditions in the Merchant of Venice and Cymbeline. Thus far the action seems to have been to him the chief inviolable thing; but we have shown (p. 234) that he rather treated it as an arbitrary, worthless symbol, while he drew the character and its motives of action so entirely out of his own mind, with such firmness, truth, and consistency, that it is evident how much more important he considered the cause of the action to be than the action itself. Let us test the matter in another way. The story of an old tragedy, Iphigenia in Aulis and Tauris for example, related for its own sake, without characteristic or motive, is beautiful and valuable only on account of the ingenious contrast of the two sacrifices; but Shakespeare's fictions are often strange in themselves, and receive their value only from their characteristic foundation.

Hence, then, a Shakespearian theory of poetry in contrast, but not in contradiction, to the Aristotelian would consider—if there must be a separation—*character* to be the most important part of the drama, and *action* to be only secondary. And hence it is that Shakespeare's characters have always been his greatest glory. If on other points there are discordant opinions, all agree to praise him on this. His mastery of character and motives not only at all times attracted the best actors, but soon also the dullest censors, and transformed pedants into enthusiasts. Pope called it a sort of injury to designate Shakespeare's characters by so inapplicable a name as copies of nature; the critics, emulating each other in bold comparisons, called the poet the instrument, the rival, the completer, the outdoer of nature; and indeed it would have

been injustice to compare his characters with those of any other poet but Homer alone. For only of his can we assert what is universally true of Shakespeare's, that they are not gathered out of a casual contact with a narrow circle of society, but sought for and obtained out of the whole of humanity; that they are not borrowed from other poetry, that they do not belong to the family of poetical but real beings, that they are not designs from pictures, not even designs from nature, but nature itself. Every individual of these characters stands, intellectually, as firmly circumscribed as the figures of Homer are plastically modelled; all surplus and deficiency are so avoided that addition or omission is equally impossible without changing the effect, and with it the character; the intricate blending of characters with their passions and impulses is so perfect that a separation is impossible without destruction, so that Voltaire and Rymer could make actions and characters ludicrous merely by the petty artifice of concealing the motive. Every feature, however undesigned it might appear, harmonises with wonderful truth with the whole picture of the single characters; every speech is in unison with the whole being. Scarcely have we once dared to point out a passage which seemed out of tune with the rest; to point out even this exception was only possible because the truest and liveliest delineation is so completely the rule. Here is no stage language or manners, no standing parts, nothing that can be called ideal or favourite stage characters, no heroes of theatre or romance; in this active world there is nothing fantastic, nothing unsound, nothing exaggerated nor empty; neither the poet nor the actor speaks in them, but creative nature alone, which seems to dwell in and to animate these dead images. These forms change, as they do in life, from the deepest to the shallowest, from the most deformed to the most noble, in many-coloured variety; a prodigal dispenses these riches, but the impression is that he is as inexhaustible as Nature herself. And as it is in nature, not one of these figures resembles another in features; there are groups which have a family likeness, but not two individuals resembling one another; they become known to us one after the other fragmentarily, as we experience with living acquaintances; they make here and there different impressions on different people, and are interpreted by each according to his own feelings. In Antony we saw plainly that the poet makes this man to be differently judged of by different

natures even in the play itself. Hence it would be an idle undertaking to endeavour, in the explanation of Shakespeare's characters, to balance the different opinions of men, or arbitrarily to insist upon our own; each can only announce his own view; and must then learn whose opinion stands best the test of time and of the experience of life. For returning to these characters at another time, our own greater ripeness and enlarged experience will lay open to us ever new features in them, of which we ourselves were not previously aware. Even the deepest among them cannot be quite exhausted but by men who have made analogous experiences in their own lives. Whoever has not been wrecked on the shore of life with principles and ideals, whoever has not bled with inward sorrow, has not suppressed holy feelings, and stumbled over the enigmas of the world, will only half understand Hamlet; whoever has not experienced the disparagement of merit will not comprehend Othello and Iago; whoever has lived through these days of constant collision between human and political duties will comprehend Brutus quite differently than before. And whoever has felt these experiences most deeply, whoever has borne the sharpest pains of consciousness, will understand Shakespeare's characters like one of the initiated; to such an one they will be ever new, ever more admirable, ever more intense in their significance; like the remarkable men of history and real life, he will make out of them a school of life, having nothing of the danger of almost all modern poetry, which is apt to lead us astray, and to give us heroes of romance instead of true men.

But although Shakespeare's characters are true pictures of nature, they are not nature only without the assistance of art. They are neither mere abstractions and ideals, nor common chance personifications, such as life brings indifferently before us, but they stand in the free, true, real artistic medium between both. People have often opposed them to the typical characters of the Greek drama, as delineations of perfect individuality; but the contradictory opinions in this respect suffice to prove that this definition needs an essential amplification. If Pope, for example, said that Shakespeare's characters were individuals like those in real life, Johnson, on the contrary, remarked that the characters of other poets are individuals, but that Shakespeare's commonly represent classes. Again, if Ulrici called them mere Englishmen of the sixteenth century, we have imagined

we could distinguish among them Romans, even of different ages. If, on the contrary, a third person found these Romans not individually Romish enough, another replied, very justly, the first object of the poet was to depict men. These contrarieties show clearly that truth lies in the middle course. If instead of comparing Shakespeare's characters with the sketches of the old dramatists, we compare them more correctly with the finished portraits of Homer, we shall at once perceive the relation between them. Homer's characters are no more merely typical than Shakespeare's are merely individual. The Homeric are individuals, only that these natures of a heroic age must be in every respect more simple and devoid of all mental resources, and that the epos will not bear the familiar style of the drama; the Shakespearian are typical characters, only that the lively manner of dramatic representation, and the intellectual nature of modern times, necessitated greater individualisation. Shakespeare has never drawn anything special without generalising it at the same time; he has never represented anything typical without furnishing it with the special features of the individual. If we mean by special characters only the ideal masks of the Greeks, or the abstract personifications of passion into which the French re-modelled them, or the superficial figures of the Spanish comedy, then Shakespeare has created nothing but individuals; if we mean by individuals chance personifications of common life, such as the humorous romances of the English described later, then he has only depicted typical characters. The paradox is true; when a character with him is most a portrait, then it is at the same time most the representation of a whole class of men. Nowhere are the peculiarities so numerous as in Falstaff, Othello, and Hamlet, and yet these are essentially typical characters; indeed Hamlet has been called, with at least partial truth, the type of men in general. This artistic blending of the general and the particular lies in this, that Shakespeare has nowhere depicted men of exceptional natures and properties belonging to any fixed time or place; his characters are above all men stirred by the emotions and passions common to human nature in all ages; and consequently they, as well as the Homeric characters, can be comprehended by all time, however strange the English colouring of the sixteenth century and that of the heroic ages of Greece may make them to us. Individual as they are, yet are they always artistically generalised, even if only by elevating

them; Shakespeare's representations of the passionate, the prodigal, the hypocrite, are not portraits of this or that individual, but examples of these passions, elevated out of particular into general truth, of which in real life we may find a thousand diminished copies, but never the original in the exact proportions given by the poet. Let us compare in Aristotle's ethics the complete abstract pattern of intemperance and high-mindedness with the character of Lear and Coriolanus (in the latter of whom we have only to observe the exaggeration of high-mindedness into haughtiness), and we shall be surprised to find how completely the abstract ideal image, the spirit of the character, is merely embodied by Shakespeare without accidental ingredient, although all seems only the purest reality. So entirely is every part, every peculiarity, referred to the general idea of the character, to a ruling motive; so entirely is every manifestation by word or deed related to a mental principle in the agent, to an animating power, to a specially developed organ, a predominant quality, which stands out as the main impulse, the nature, the law, the essence, the idea of the character; so entirely is everything unessential and accidental, everything which is not in close connection with that chief property, excluded. The characters move as in reality, but we recognise the elements of their composition in distinct separation; they are full of life as in nature, but mentally transparent, and they have been excellently compared to clocks in glass cases, where the mechanism which sets them in motion is visible.

After this digression concerning Shakespeare's characters, we resume the thread of our remarks. Whilst Aristotle regarded the action as the most important thing in the drama, and accordingly declared unity of action to be the chief law of dramatic economy, Shakespeare, on the other hand, considered the main point to be character and action united, or character alone; consequently, if he would agree with Aristotle in spirit and sense, he must place *his* main law, unity of character, either on an equality with or in the stead of the law of unity of action. This he has done. Unity of character is, as we lately remarked, the essence, the idea of character. The same idea, then, which in a Shakespearian play penetrates the chief character, rules also the whole action; the same thing which gives unity to the character gives it also to the play. Shakespeare reached this enlarged law, the unity of idea, through the nature of the thing itself. When he penetrated to the root of a given action,

to its intrinsic necessity, to its main condition, to its starting point, he always found these resting in the nature of the acting character; this he laid hold of, and from the point of unity he remodelled the fiction he had adopted with a wonderful poetic instinct, thus grasping at once the living principle of the character, the action, and the drama. Beyond this there was nothing more to do; no future genius will ever be able to discover a deeper law of dramatic composition, as little as any epic poet will ever be able to surpass in structure the works of Homer. With this idea, with this germ, which encloses within it the dramatic action, Shakespeare acted like a wise gardener, of whom it is hard to say whether his art is experience of nature, or his natural treatment art. He puts these germs, each after its own kind, in the soil that suits them best, gives them, with respect to sun and wind, the most favourable situation, plants in their vicinity the things that hurt them least, and which improve and adorn the view, shuns no toil, and spares no pruning, delights in the natural fruit, and yet gladly 'marries the gentler scion to the wild stock.' This is what all our separate deductions have pointed out: that the structure of every Shakespearian drama is carried out in a strict proportion with as much instinctive feeling as artistic insight; that there exists a harmonious relation between the whole and its parts, between the situation and the requirements of the historical soil, between both of these and the action, between the whole and the characters, their motives and their passions. Further, that the characters are so arranged and chosen that one serves as a foil to another, thereby depicting their motives more distinctly, and thereby again placing the action and the idea of the piece in a stronger light. By this arrangement and relation of all the parts to one intellectual centre, everything extraneous, arbitrary, and unessential falls away from the action; everything episodical, and apparently distant, and foreign is brought together and united, so that the junction of all peculiarities, however far apart they may have lain, makes at last a connected and concordant whole; the most violent deviations from the main road always lead eventually to the same goal; even in the contrasts there appears similarity, and in the varieties unison; and the most anomalous parts, even the comic interludes in the serious dramas, aim at one and the same effect. Starting from this unity of idea, Shakespeare may have allowed himself to deviate from the law of unity of action and to combine several actions.

Nevertheless, we admire more than many other creations of Titian's art those pictures of his in which the chief action is accompanied by a second which stands in a symbolic relation, in *unity of spirit* with the first; the outward eye must wander, but the inward will be fixed in a far higher sense on the one soul of the picture. Nothing is more false than the uniting of two heterogeneous actions, such as we see in the plays of the Ben Jonson School; they are repugnant to the feelings before we know why; we watch, as it were, for the progress of a melody, which is suddenly crossed by another quite incongruous with it. But Shakespeare's method of harmonising a second action with the first, of developing in his double actions different but equally essential parts of one idea, together or in opposition, so that their inner connection constitutes their unity, this is a great and astonishing enrichment of art. This method serves at the same time to complete the illusion of the work of art. For the more the single parts in the drama seem disparate, the more will that variety and freedom of movement be attained which conceal the artist's intention. The work of art is like an animated organism; no machinery reveals the creative artist; the body of action appears, as it were, in an entirely arbitrary motion, and its law lies hid within like an invisible soul.

Only the artistic ability with which the arranging hand in Shakespeare's compositions is concealed can explain why it remained so long undiscovered, and that it required a master like Goethe to show its inner conformity to rule. Even after it was shown there was a disinclination to believe it, because this new view militated so strongly against the ruling prejudice. Hazlitt was on the track of this regularity in Cymbeline, but he seemed to shrink from the conviction that the poet had intentionally created the concordance of the actions in his dramas, and imagined rather that he had produced them unconsciously merely from the force of natural association of feelings. People were so fettered by the idea of Shakespeare's natural genius, that Ben Jonson's impartial testimony to the assistance of art in his works received as little attention as Goethe's intimation and Coleridge's assertion that the poet's judgment and regularity were as great as his unconscious productiveness. The question whether Shakespeare's works are rather the results of the happiest instinct, or of a wonderful power of conscious intellect, is so closely connected with the maintaining of his assumed irregu-

larity, that we must dedicate a few words to it in this place. It is true that the first impression of Shakespeare's works, on the youthful reader especially, who does not immediately perceive the deep traces of mind, is that of an entirely instinctive production. Shakespeare was a sensualist of a thoroughly intuitive nature. He was, perhaps, even more than Goethe, 'devoted to the holy spirit of the senses,' and averse to one-sided abstraction and philosophic speculation. Nature and humanity were his book of revelation, and experience the source of his wisdom. His sense must have been the soundest that ever man possessed; his eye a smooth mirror, his ear an echo, which repeated all sounds and images with the utmost fidelity. When he speaks of music, of pictures, of inanimate nature, he is as perfectly at home in these regions as in history and social life. With this healthy keenness of sense he must have united a desire of knowledge to which nothing was indifferent, a watchfulness that nothing could escape, an openness of feeling that left nothing untouched, a memory which retained every impression, and was ready for use on all subjects, far off or near. And with the same soundness with which all objects were received by his senses, they were transmitted by these to his creative genius. He was in the happy case of the popular poet of the earliest times, his memory was not overloaded, his senses were not weakened by much knowledge, his mind was uninjured by learning, everything in him arose, at first hand, from nature and experience. For this reason every sensation is so prompt, every thought so striking, every image so descriptive; for this reason his sayings are like swords, which cut the knots of intricate truths; they are like the words of Solomon upon the most pungent problems, not only poetical, but practical solutions of questions. Dr. Hales, in a learned session at Eton, once formally weighed his sentences with those of the ancients, and found them even more substantial than theirs. Shakespeare, like his Perdita, might consider himself lucky in being devoid of learning, at least of overburdensome learning, since even without it he was a master for most teachers. If then what he adopted and received was in this way so lively and ready, we should be inclined to conclude that his power of production also was as ready and as little disturbed by consciousness and planned labour as the poems of a Homer. But there lies a great difference in the nature of the materials, in the nature of the times, and in the nature of the different forms of

poetry. Shakespeare's materials were, like the time and like human nature, penetrated with intellectual elements, which could not be understood without conscious power of mind. The mysteries of mind are not self-evident and recognised; they require a knowledge of the inner life, and a constant exercise of the mental eye. The Homeric poems were originally rhapsodies, which required the arranging hand of later times to give them with conscious intention that unity which in the 'Odyssey,' as in Shakespeare's poems, is rather to be called a unity of idea than of action; the drama, on the contrary, is the work of one head, which must apply the arranging hand himself. In this species, moreover, there lies everything that makes unconscious production almost impossible. Let it be granted that Shakespeare wrote his first works from the mere impulse of poetic instinct, that he never even doubted after their creation, nor even examined whether they were good or not, yet the circumstance alone of his dramas being represented led necessarily, in the course of time, to consciousness. The actors worked with him and he with them, their whole business being to account to themselves for every line of their parts; and Shakespeare himself prescribed to them to play their parts with constant consideration of the preceding and of the whole, Could it be conceived that his creative eye alone had not only penetrated, but formed the matter; could it even be thought possible, which is far more incredible, that the combination of the parts, the parallelism of the characters, the convergence of the episodes, the form and structure of the artistic work, had succeeded without his will or knowledge, as it were in his sleep, that he was altogether the unconscious vessel of pure revelation; yet the consideration and conversation about the play thus produced must have more and more awakened consciousness and introduced reflection into the poet's work; he must have had *to learn* the technicality of art, the neglect of which was so severely revenged on Goethe, even if, like Goethe, he had struggled against it. We think, however, that a consciousness in his work was by nature neither remote from nor foreign to the mind of Shakespeare. Just read the passages in Timon, and in the Midsummer Night's Dream, where he speaks of the nature of poets and poetry, and say, was he a poet to whom art was a mystery, and its technicality a sealed letter? He produced in the same way as his Posthumus, of whom he himself says, when the latter is describing his wife as a work of art, his

tongue made the picture, and then put a mind in it. Thus he did himself, and this in a wonderful medium between a strong creative impulse and conscious meditation, with the rarest union of judgment and instinct of nature and mind. And what is most astonishing is, not that what he had perceived obtained with him a most sensible and reasonable utterance, without passing through reflection and consciousness, but that this utterance maintained itself in all its power and freshness, in spite of this process (*Durchgang*); that the keenness of perception, as well as the ease of the mental elaboration, permits none of the tedium of labour to be visible. The ripening and the birth took place rapidly, without the waiting for the nine months of the human embryonic life, much less for the nine years of the Horatian file. This working together of instinct and mind in Shakespeare is not exactly wonderful in itself, but only so from this power and strength; in a less degree it takes place in all continued occupation among men of a healthy nature; and those are the most luminous moments of success in any work when the thinking mind is in unison with the instinctive feeling of the acting man. In this unison genius really displays itself, not in the sole rule of an irregular instinct or in the state of a pretended inspiration. For genius does not manifest itself in the predominance of any single power, nor is it in itself a definite faculty, but it is the harmonious combination, the united totality, of all human faculties. And if in Shakespeare's works we admire his imaginative power as well as his understanding, both these combined with his sense of beauty, and all of them not without his moral sense; and if we attribute all together to his genius, we must comprehend under this head the union of all these faculties, and not consider it as an isolated power, which excludes judgment and reflection, and whose works do not submit to plan and rule. Much rather is the idea of rule essentially inherent to that of genius, and that whole conception of a genius acting without law is the invention of pedants, which has had the sad effect of begetting that mass of false geniuses, who are morally without law, and æsthetically work without law, as if to entitle themselves to the name, according to this convenient definition. If we call Shakespeare's intuition that of a genius, because his outer and inner sense perceived objects most truly, and penetrated beyond their casual excrescences and deficiencies to their essence, their inner truth, that is to say, their law, so on the other hand his

poetry is that of a genius, because while he reproduced his objects in artistic representation, he also developed the represented matter in the same way from elementary conditions, from its laws and germs, and because every particular thing is placed as of itself in correct relation to this law, and takes its proper position. So surely as in his observations he referred from given effects to the necessary causes, as surely did he advance in his productions from the cause he had discovered to all its ramifications, but always in the regular order of cause and effect, as if Nature had entrusted to him the secret of her organisation and her working powers. But this highest regularity which governs Shakespeare's plays was not to be divined and could not be acquired by the slight juggle of a dreamy fancy. It presupposes a conscious penetration into the depths of human nature, a candid spirit, which disposes of all the faculties of the inner life, which knows and understands the motions of the human heart, which has pondered deeply and comprehensively upon the domain of human powers and passions; without this contemplative meditation such regularity is not possible, nor such an embodiment of the spiritual, such a spiritualisation of the sensual, as characterises Shakespeare's and all true poetry. The knightly romances of the middle ages show plainly enough what can be accomplished by mere divination in psychological problems; they are, therefore, worthless and formless. The poets of these tales were wanting in genius, in that unfallen spirit (*ungefallene Geist*) which contains within it the original harmony with man's true nature, which consequently knows how to recognise and describe the operations of the soul and the passions, and which, while describing them, necessarily comprehends in itself the law-giving and regulating power, and can dispense with conventional, external rules, which are, as Lessing says, like a crutch for the healthy and sound. These conventional rules may be learned, but the law of genius is born with it. The rules of the French drama may be acquired; they enable even moderate talents to produce works of understanding, but true genius can neither imitate nor be imitated. He would be very much mistaken who thought he could write works like Shakespeare's because he knew the laws of their production. For even the judgment that made these works so regular is only one of the faculties that altogether constitute genius. Shakespeare lies equally removed from those of his dramatic countrymen who composed

irregular works with merely natural talent, and from those Frenchmen who with intellectual dexterity wrought according to an arbitrary rule; these separate ways seldom lead beyond the point where true art only begins. When a regularly formed work of art has been accomplished consciously, as it was by Lessing, it is further requisite that this regularity should be as much as possible concealed, that the intellectual contents should be wrapped up in sensible forms. If we ascribe the regularity of a work of art chiefly to conscious treatment, still that specific faculty of *poetic* genius, of representing everything plastically, in sensible representation with living imagery, is an essentially natural gift, an involuntary want and an instinctive force and impulse of the poet's mind. By means of this gift the work of art bears the stamp of that unstudied ease which gives it the appearance of artlessness; the intentional vanishes at the first impression, as, on the contrary, on closer inspection, the apparently unintentional vanishes before the underlying regularity. As in genius itself the opposition between spirit and nature is removed, so in its works the real appearance, and the ideal truth, image, and thought, the spiritual contents and the sentient form, are reconciled and adjusted.

But passing from the regularity in Shakespeare's works to the consideration of their *conformity to art*, where in these works so admired for their truth to nature, where is the *ideality* which constitutes the true poet, the elevation above the horizon of reality, which we require in the true work of art?

It is essentially the casualties and deficiencies of the real world, its imperfections and deformities, which have generated in the human mind the need of art; on the ground of this need, art received its law and vocation to free us from all the baseness, unmeaningness, and ugliness which cleave to actual life, to elevate us to the serene height of a fairer existence, and, imitating nature, to ennoble it. This law was not at all unfamiliar to the people of Shakespeare's time. His contemporary Bacon gave to poetry this great vocation: as the world of the senses is of lower value than the human soul, so poetry must grant to men what history denies; it must satisfy the mind with the appearance of things, as the satisfying reality is not to be had, and thus prove that the human soul delights

in a more perfect order and a nobler greatness than are to be found in nature. Shakespeare himself appears to have attained to the same views. He is everywhere of Aristotle's opinion, that art consists in the imitation of nature, or, as he would have said, in the emulative imitation of nature. Thus we have seen, in Antony, that he knew the two-fold instance of nature outdoing all the ideal of art, and of art triumphantly defying nature. For he would have shared Goethe's opinion, that the ideal of art coincides with the ideas and types of nature; he would not, like Schiller, besides and beyond this ideal developed out of nature, have admitted another transcendental ideal lying beyond the world of the senses.

But if Shakespeare theoretically held this correct view of art, how does his practice agree with it? Have we not ourselves said that the interest in moral and psychological truth is always higher with him than the interest in outer æsthetic beauty? Did we not thereby place ourselves in the ranks of those who admire nothing in Shakespeare but nature, reality—the realistic principle? Did he not, in this striving after truth to nature, often sink to the level of the Dutch painting, entirely forgetting that province of art which lies in developing the beautiful and the noble out of the deformed and the mean? Did he not in representing the bad, which is discordant and ugly in itself, far overstep the line of beauty? Is not the combination of the noble with the mean, the mixing of jest and earnest, alone sufficient to characterise the common reality of nature in his plays? And did he not too much betray in all this the age when to expose the nakedness of nature, even to its utmost ugliness, was the universal business of popular poetry, of that clownish literature of burlesques and satires peculiar to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and in higher regions even the business of a Machiavelli and a Spinoza?

In what then is it (we repeat the question) in which the ideal vein of the poet could manifest itself?

We would answer this question otherwise than some have done; Ulrici for example, who considered that Shakespeare's only method of giving his works an ideal stamp lay in the unity of idea in the composition. We believe the ideal vein of a great poet betrays itself as little in single expedients as his vein of genius in the predominance of a single faculty; we would reply, this ideal vein manifests itself in nothing less than everything.

It shows itself first in the diction, as we have previously remarked, in the use of metaphorical language, and in the nature and object of this. In the double nature of metaphors, in this combination of similar objects, in the blending of the twofold in one, there lies of itself a more powerful and elevated expression, such as is suitable to the description of mighty passions; the figurative impulse of poetic fancy finds utterance in them, because they contain, within the smallest medium of poetry, that embodiment of the spiritual, which is on a large scale the highest aim of all art.

In the second place, the representation essentially contributes to the ideal effect of a Shakespearian drama; by means of this we first perceive the whole power of the poet. However natural the scenic representation of a play may be, it will always raise the spectator above the prose of reality. For no other art works with such united powers and means on human fancy. All other arts take away somewhat from the life of the object represented in their attempt to imitate life. Painting takes away the full form, sculpture the colour, both the motion; the epos changes acts into words, music changes words into tones, it is the drama only that uses all the means at once—form, colour, tone, word, look, motion, and action; it gives the full effect of what is represented, and takes away only the narrow boundaries of time and space. The result of this effect can only be laboriously supplied in reading by recollection and imagination; we remain with feelings, considerations, and doubts, suspended at isolated parts, and with difficulty arrive at the total impression of the whole we have read, much less to an idea of the impression which a representation is able to produce. In representation, on the contrary, single impressions do not take root, they pass away before they can become fixed; the few inequalities, which arrest us in reading, do no harm to the force and beauty of the body of the drama when in full movement. During the performance we are not, as in reading, forced to dwell upon the words, but on that which the play represents, the action. It is just this which brings out the ideal effect. For in the man in action all his combined powers are called into play, deeds claim the man's whole being, and bring his best or strongest parts to their height; his sensitiveness and thought, his will, and all the energy and properties of his nature, converge as in a point to the aim of his action, the man moves in his entirety, and this

is of itself a poetical movement, one which every deed even in real life bears within itself. The more naturally this is represented by the performer, the greater will be the charm of the performance, the more strongly will the force and depth of the effect, as well as the ideal splendour of the drama, stand out, and for this no degree of thought and explanation can compensate.

The ideal in Shakespeare's dramas shows itself further, it is true, in that point also which Ulrici laid stress upon, in the unity of composition, in the close relation of all parts and episodes, of all characters and actions, to the one fundamental idea of the poet's plan; a quality on which especially the spiritualisation of the matter rests, which is the essential mark of the ideal nature of a poetic work.

This ideality shows itself also in the high moral spirit which, in Shakespeare's plays, controls the complications of fate and the issues of human actions, in that spirit which develops before us that higher order which Bacon required in poetry, indicating the eternal and uncorrupted justice in human things, the finger of God, which our dull eyes do not perceive in reality.

Shakespeare's idealising spirit shows itself also, where it will be most disputed, in his characters. Here the poet indeed clings most firmly to reality, because here the motives of the action were to be grounded, their roots to be planted; and this he thought he could not make true enough to nature, because with the truth of the motive the value of the work of art stands and falls. But however much Shakespeare's characters appear to be simply natural, we have shown above that as soon as we place them beside life, their ideal character, their typical greatness, the normal idea of the given form of character, comes to view; they may appear merely as simple copies from originals, even of a subordinate or doubtful nature, yet they are always, according to the Aristotelian law, embellished, or at least placed in a strong or favourable light. If we examine his tragic figures, in which the Aristotelian requirement of mixed characters excludes all ideal perfection, in which the inner discord, the turning away from the good and beautiful, is the theme to be represented, we shall still discover even in the self-destroying passion a greatness, and in the aberration a human nobility, which compels our admiration. In the worst of his villains there is still a power of self-command, or an intellectual

superiority, or a steady consistency and a grandeur in misfortune, which gives, even to the vicious, a better or at least a strong and uncommon side. If we look at his burlesque characters, which appear compounded of folly and caricature, they are always given as shadows to bring the fairer side of human nature into the light; but even considered in themselves they afford, like the best *genre* pictures, an artistic satisfaction, not only by the reflection of the pleasant humour with which the poet depicts them, but also by the inner self-satisfaction and happy determination in these figures, which affect us agreeably wherever we meet them.

But let us leave our comparison of Shakespeare's characters with life, and compare them with the best that the dramatic art of modern times has produced, and then we shall see with astonishment not only what a quintessence of nature, but even of ideal beauty, dwells in these forms. Ask the actor, and he will tell you that in every drama of the modern poets there are weak parts, which a good performer dislikes to take; Shakespeare has hardly any such. Compare any of his unimportant characters—that picture, for example, of weakness, unfaithfulness, and varying inclination, Proteus—with Goethe's Clavigo, Weislingen, or Ferdinand, and even the weakling becomes a strong character; place Antony beside these, and the effeminate man becomes a hero. In all poetry this can only be compared with the characters of Homer, with whom even Paris is a hero. But if we turn to his most ideal characters, to his Henry and Posthumus, in whom, not without conflict, the highest degree of human virtue and intellectual excellence is attained, they are not, indeed, like those heroes of the French stage, or the flowery creations of Schiller's, images of merely fancied existence, they are realistic ideals, but on that very account truly ideal characters, consistent with truth, whose rare eminence in Shakespeare's group of characters is raised, even by the rareness of their number, into a far higher light than the excellence of those empty personifications of abstract ideals. Yet even these do not represent the highest of Shakespeare's characters: these must be sought among his women. No poet has at once so truly depicted and so highly exalted the female sex as Shakespeare. Nowhere has he condescended to represent those female characters which were the favourites of our greatest modern poets, those beings midway between criminals and martyrs, between courtesans and goddesses;

nowhere has he multiplied the immoral among the sex with that predilection, nor surrounded their weakness with that attraction which is prevalent amongst us. He has never repeated his Cleopatra and Cressida, and even in once representing them he has not clothed the charming temptress with tempting charms. Where he has depicted women who from an easy intellectual adroitness distinguish themselves by a free and fearless tongue, he has surrounded these Rosalinds and Portias with a wall of unapproachable chastity. He leads them, disguised in male attire, into ticklish and trying situations and into rude contacts, and even then the freest among them come out of these situations with perfect innocence and purity. It is in the naïve female characters of his third period, those which would have been as difficult for Goethe to design as Goethe's females of the naïve cast were for Schiller, that the beauty of the feminine, nay, even of the human ideal of that period is most perfect. In them is seen that completeness of nature by which we understand that which makes us men so much oftener look up admiringly towards women than ever we could feel ourselves tempted to look down upon them. No single prevailing quality disturbs the balance of their nature; the qualities of spirit and soul mingle together in perfect harmony, the original indivisibility of nature, her highest idea, appears in its completeness,—the concord of head and heart, of inclination and will; the unconsciousness of themselves and their prerogatives, the certainty with which they are wholly and ever what they are; the self-reliance with which they permit nothing from without to trouble their course; the unconcern with which, disturbed by no considerations, they give way to their feelings; the way in which they are entirely occupied with the subjects that for the moment affect them,—this admirable totality gives to these creatures their endless charm. Compare these beings, who are untouched by all the feminine tricks of coquetry and affectation, and all the little devices of vanity, with the vague characters of Schiller, with the vapid figures of even Goethe, in both of whom the pressure of conventional life stifles the germ of fresh nature which springs forth in healthy strength in all Shakespeare's women, and then learn what is true ideality, whether of art or of moral life.

In all this, however, the final verdict respecting the ideality of Shakespeare's dramas has not yet been pronounced. That

can, unquestionably, only be felt and observed in the whole, not in this or that isolated part. The single character can properly only be a means to the aim of the whole, and the ideal may be so far latent within it, without this being prejudicial to the work of art. In the statues of antiquity the ideal lies in the single form, because this form is at once the complete work of art. In a compound work of poetry we seek the artistic hand first in the symmetry and combination of the whole, and in the definite bearing of its contents. We cannot blame the distorted, the mean, and the bad in separate parts, when they serve to place the higher, healthier, and better in a fairer light. The poet can show us in his characters a declension from the line of beauty, truth, and goodness, an overstepping or a falling short of it, provided he himself with his arranging hand keeps closely to this intellectual direction, to this line, provided he measures by this line the value of the characters, their fates, and the origin and issue of the action. The ideal, the necessary, the moral, and the true may even appear only in the results of what happens, and may in proper tragedy be always of a negative kind; yet the poet has already fulfilled his task in that poetic-moral background, that ideal heaven over his real world. The ideal, then, rests finally, not or not only in the quality of the characters, and not in the nature of the action, but where also the unity of Shakespeare's dramas lies—in the idea.

But however true all this, which we have endeavoured to clear up, may be, yet something remains behind in our feelings which refuses to be satisfied with what we have said. The realistic element in Shakespeare is so evident, when we compare him with the Greek drama, that no protest, however striking, can remove the impression of this sharp contrast. Such general impressions have indeed extraordinarily deceived even the great masters of art. Goethe had long seen an unnatural ideality in Homer, until he found it disappear more and more before the wonderfully real truth of the poet; Schiller, on the contrary, at first saw nothing but realism in Shakespeare, and felt repelled by his harsh truth; but afterwards he became more and more persuaded of his ideality, which seemed to bring him near, in his view, to the old drama. The mass of real matter is so great in Shakespeare that it is difficult to penetrate to his spirit, which essentially requires the representation by great actors under intelligent direction to bring

it to light; this is it which in this question will always lead to great errors of judgment. But even if we constrain ourselves to see ancient tragedy in the most realistic, and Shakespeare in the most idealistic light, still we shall always find it very difficult to compare our dramatist with Homer in regard to the equal balance of real and ideal elements—a merit in the epic poet which our Goethe and Schiller never ceased to admire.

When the ideal of modern art is in question we shall always be tempted to injustice, if we do not carefully weigh the different conditions under which ancient and modern times fostered the arts. Ancient art, arising out of a pure, uncorrupt primitive existence, and among men in intimate communion with nature, carried out, as it were, in those wonderful forms of Grecian sculpture, the creations of nature, elevating and amplifying her when she had reached the limit of her formations. That race of men succeeded in discovering the laws of perfect beauty at once in nature and in the human mind, and in stamping them upon physically dead, but spiritually ever living forms. The best which this art accomplished, and which dramatic poetry side by side with it produced, has the advantage of a sort of necessity, truth, and beauty for which every art in modern times has striven in vain, since we have for ever outstepped the youth of the world and its easy conditions of existence, and entered a life rendered hard by a thousand cares for subsistence, and by painful struggles with material obstructions and mental difficulties. We return to the poems of such periods for the same reasons that incline us also to their history. It is easier to enjoy Athens' greatness under Pericles than the Periclean age of England under Elizabeth, only because the greatness of the first is more simple; if both poets are equally familiar to us, we more readily pass from Shakespeare to the Orestes of Æschylus than the reverse, because it is easier and pleasanter to linger in the lighter, youthful, innocent conditions of art as of life than in the more complicated ones. We put forward these propositions not in any degree to embitter our admiration for modern art—encumbered with difficulties as it is, the mere conquest of which is a high merit—but only to intimate that our pleasure in it has not for a moment made us partial or forgetful of our admiration of ancient art, which will ever remain the purest source of all art-culture so long as the taste and civilisation of the world do not

go wholly astray. But since in modern times human nature is immensely dilated, society enlarged in all directions, and religious, literary, and political culture has laid open immeasurable spaces and depths, it was no longer enough to reflect in art a merely approximate national culture, narrow, easily comprehended, working only in one direction, and soon reaching a certain height; it was necessary to master the whole wide world and its history, all its external and internal matter; and *to hold up the mirror to nature* is, perhaps, a more difficult task for art nowadays than it was in ancient times to emulate her noblest works.

Nevertheless, in antiquity also the real truth of nature, the reflected image of life, was always (at least in that branch of art which received the highest finish in Homer's epos) the first condition of poetry; in this requirement Homer would agree with Shakespeare, and with Lope de Vega, and with the most genuine realistic poet of modern times, our own Goethe. The only difference is that in those times life in itself cast a fairer image upon the mirror. The heroic world, the great subject of Greek poetry, is cognisant only of men who rest upon themselves alone, who, unconfined by political and conventional bonds, are a law to themselves; such an age is itself poetic from the youthfulness and simplicity of manners. In modern times, and in our northern climate especially, the human body and frame lost their original beauty by outward covering and the inward disguise of hypocrisy, and by manifold deviations from pure nature; the wants of life among us furrow the form and features, and efface the fair type of nature; they favour on the other hand the development of the individual, they elaborate the mind and its resources in a more complete manner, and generate energy of character. Hence it is that all ideal of art among the Teutonic races, besides its contrast to ancient art, bears another special stamp quite distinct from the Southern Romanic art even of modern times, such as is quite characteristic of Shakespeare's drama. Southern art, whether music, painting, or poetry, has ever preferred beauty of outward form, the appearances that touch and please the senses, smoothness of melody, soothing sounds in verse, and regular forms; Northern art, on the contrary, was forced by the deficiencies of external nature to cultivate the inner and spiritual, the significant in import, the heart in musical composition, sound sense in versification, and truth in psychological expression. In

these qualities Northern music and painting surpassed the South, and a master like Titian reconciled in this respect North and South, while Handel, like Shakespeare, first became great when he gave up the Italian for the German taste. This direction of art rendered unavoidable the introduction of all moral and spiritual elements, of which numberless Spanish and Italian poems have a very moderate share; and this combination compensates to all Northern art, by an intrinsic worth, for the loss of that external attractiveness of which it deprives it; this it is which determines the balance between a Shakespeare and an Ariosto so decidedly in favour of the first. The notions of beauty demand, according to this, an essential discrimination. In nature we may find a woman beautiful, although she may possess no regular beauty of feature; the play of soul, the appearance of inward beauty, makes amends for, nay, even surpasses, the cold beauty of form in which no mind shines through. So a tree bursting into blossom is indisputably a charming sight to everyone, although not even to be represented pictorially. The soul, the life of the tree manifests itself at its highest point in the moment of blossom, in the first appearance of fruit, and this living natural beauty delights us more than beauty of art. More at least *for the moment*, although hardly for a continuance. For to the essence of this living beauty of nature, transitoriness necessarily belongs. We could no more endure the long continuance of the loveliest play of soul in the human countenance, from the overstrained attention necessary, than we could the brilliant abundance of full bloom in a tree. But beauty of feature in itself, the beauty of a finely-grown tree in its unpretending form, wins us exactly by its continuance and uniform aspect, and is therefore artistically purer and more valuable. In the longer epic, therefore, we could not bear the imitation of that living and intellectual beauty; it requires plastic beauty and a severe well-sustained style; in the drama, on the other hand, which passes before us transiently, in the short time occupied by the representation, in which, according to its idealistic nature, the spiritual is designed to be manifested, imitating life by life and not in dead letter or form—in the drama that inner spiritual, that living beauty is quite in its proper place. And this is the reason why Shakespeare's interest in moral and psychological truth is always greater than his interest in exterior æsthetic beauty, why his poetic ideas were always of a moral psychological nature, why his art ideal

is essentially of a spiritual nature. Through this art ideal, in which truth, goodness, and beauty go hand in hand, Shakespeare belongs wholly to the Teutonic race and the Northern style of taste. But, leaving off the comparison of Shakespeare with the ancient poets, the place which he fills within the region of Northern artistic taste, with regard to his ideality, is most discernible when we examine him in general beside the art productions of modern times.

It might have been expected that the more the purely poetic circumstances of antiquity were lost in the intricate relations of modern times, the more must the latter have felt the need of elevating themselves by their art productions out of prosaic reality. This need the middle ages seem indeed to have felt. The chivalric epic poetry of romances moves wholly in ideal, supernatural spheres, and the allegories and idylls, which succeeded to these, retained this idealistic character in another way. The remoteness of these poems from the actual world, and from every-day humanity, is universal. The wonderful and fantastic, the supernatural in all forms, giants, knights-errant, magicians, martyrs, performers of miracles, saints, confessors of all kinds, are the known subjects of these works. In these wholly ideal matters reality was introduced in a way which art ought to have utterly avoided. Into these romantic poems of the middle ages there entered the well-known notions and representations of a peculiar kind of honour, love, and truth, a peculiar feudal service and love service, which rested wholly on the conventional customs of courtly chivalry, on the arbitrary tempers and incidental manners of the time, even on that which art should strip from reality in order to arrive at general truth. This strange mixing of the marvellous and the conventional, with everything flat and stationary which cleaves to it, has been retained by the whole of the South, even after the close of the middle ages, by the Italian epic poets no less than by the dramatists of Spain. The Spanish drama turns entirely upon an excitable and punctilious feeling of honour, and its whimsical conflicts with love and loyalty, or it took up the extravagant material of the romances of chivalry, overloaded itself with improbabilities, impossibilities, and confusion, and became, as Cervantes said, a mirror, not of life, but of adventures. This is true even of the religious drama in Spain, in which the marvellous found uncontrolled entrance, which prolonged the childhood of the stage, even after it had reached

its maturity, and even in later times led the profound genius of a Calderon into errors.

Against this art character of the middle ages among the Romanic races of the South, the taste and disposition of the Teutonic stock of the North in modern times reacted, after the humanistic and reformatory movements in the Netherlands, Germany, and England. This time offers as strong a contrast to the middle ages in art as in religion and politics. To combine this art, under the designation of romantic, with the mediæval Southern art, in contradistinction to the ancient, is as as immense a fault as it would be to unite the plastic art of Greece with the old symbolic art of the East. With the same right with which we sometimes call Shakespeare a romantic poet, because he has dramatised some tales of chivalry, we might call Homer so also, because of the adventures in his 'Odyssey.' Modern art, which in opposition to the Romanic ought to be designated as Teutonic, Northern, Protestant, exhibits rather its distinctive, sharply-defined, and essential character in this, that it equally avoided the degeneracy of romantic art in both directions, in the supernatural and the conventional elements of chivalry; and that it returned, as a natural reaction, to the principle of truth to nature, which was entirely neglected in the middle ages. This reaction, as is the case with all reactions, overdid itself in two directions. The rude literature of the sixteenth century, the *genre* painting of the Netherlands, and similar branches of art, fell back from the supernatural even *below* nature; the anti-conventional striving of Shakespeare's and Goethe's contemporaries degenerated into rudeness and free thinking; the vague characters of moral poetry changed into the eccentric ones of the original English novels; extravagant adventures took the place of common domestic prose in the tales and plays of ordinary life. Art, which had strayed among formless ideals, had to be brought back to what was comprehensible in nature in order to recover a sure standard of judgment; perfect truth was now considered all-important; the least and lowest was not considered unworthy of artistic treatment, and mere technical facility of imitation became the test of talent. In this way modern art arrived at the opposite extreme of naked truth to nature in contrast to the supernatural, and in the stead of knightly customs it placed the conventionalities of the citizen life of the Teutonic middle classes.

This then is Shakespeare's artistic greatness, that standing at the boundary line which divides two periods, at the point of transition from mediæval to modern, from Southern to Northern art, he kept the medium between these two extremes, excluded both the extravagant and the conventional, the vague and the narrow, the supernatural and the vulgar, the hyper-real and the hyper-ideal, and returned to the normal point of all art, where reality and ideality closely blend. The romantic taste found its latest refuge in the Spanish drama; the same year (1588) that Lope de Vega began his ample career in this direction, Shakespeare arose in England, and gave another aim to dramatic art. Protestantism gave him the freedom necessary to overcome the pressure of religious ordinances and despotism; he was able to banish mysteries and moralities, the whole religious circle of romantic poetry, miracles and miracle-workers, out of the realms of art; with intentional indifference he kept aloof from all false religious heroism, as well as all idyllic quietism. Where he used the marvellous he did so in a purely symbolic sense, and founded it upon truth and nature. He did not revel wildly with the strange materials of the Spanish plays of chivalry and magic, but he rested on history and the ground of real life, far from the careless genius of Lope, with whose creative impulse he united the prudence of an instinctively philosophic spirit. If the romantic art differs essentially from ancient art by singularity of motive, by close intricacies in facts, by conventionalities which cover the simple truth of nature with their capriciousness, Shakespeare in all these respects comes essentially near to the art of antiquity. In his plays there are neither miracles nor whimsical motives. He knew nothing of the conventionalities of the Spanish drama; all the interest in his plays is of a general human value. Where, as in King John, loyalty is the subject, it is mingled with all the truly human emotions and duties of patriotism and morals. Where he depicts fidelity, it is not of that conventional kind dependent on office, situation, and political relations, but free, resting on duty and inclination. Love with him has nothing to do with a traditional devotedness to woman, and does not lead to continual conflicts with regard to differences of station; when in his plays persons of unequal rank fall in love with each other, natural right always takes precedence of conventional prejudices; and those who object to such unions as Polixenes and Bertram, do so rather from general human

motives than from consideration of their high position. Thus far he seldom interferes with modern points of honour; the idea of honour with him is identified with that of merit, glory, valour, and manly worth. When Henry V. receives the dauphin's balls, he is too full of true self-respect to consider it an affront; he arms himself to punish the overweening audacity of his rival, not to avenge his own insulted honour. When Posthumus sees Imogen's honour aspersed, he wants her to defend it herself by deeds, and then he will punish Iachimo in a duel, and not by a kind of ordeal will he obtain an imaginary satisfaction for his injured honour. Shakespeare everywhere avows the pure human principles of antiquity, and puts morally the truly human and natural in the place of the mistaken ethical notions of the time, just as æsthetically he introduced it in the place of the supernatural and conventional of romantic art. And just so he avoids, on the other hand, the vulgar and conventional of Northern *genre* poetry. He has only once (in the Merry Wives of Windsor) descended to the representation of ordinary domestic life, of the world of mediocrity, and even this once he has given a counterbalance to this sphere of life in the adventurous nature of his hero. He has nowhere entered upon a delineation of originals and humourists delighting in unusual freaks and whims, as was begun by the Ben Jonson school, and carried on in the humorous novels of the English; *his* caricatured oddities, his pedants and bullies, are public property. He has nowhere depicted the dramatic burlesque, low vulgar nature for its own sake, like Holberg, but only in contrast to other characters. This is the case even in the description of his Launce or the Carrier in Henry IV., where he has descended lowest, we will even allow lower than would be advisable in any other artist.

Thus viewed in complete contrast to the extremes of Southern Romanic and Northern Teutonic art, Shakespeare, in a moral sense, always holds the just medium between the supernatural and the unnatural of life, occupying the place of real inartificial humanity, and in an æsthetic sense, the medium between extravagance and chance, the place of general truth. In an ethical point of view we have already seen him taking the lead in the direction of Teutonic art, which does not credulously acquiesce in the customs of the age and the manners of the day, but rather strives after an original purity of life, and endeavours to restore the true nature of human

relations, which is lost amid the arbitrary laws of convention. Schiller's declaration, that poets are the guardians of (pure) nature, or the searchers for it if lost, is the peculiar manifesto of modern Teutonic art; it is only true of the ancient and modern poetry of a Homer or a Shakespeare; the romantic poets of the middle ages were, in this sense, neither guardians nor searchers of nature. In an æsthetic point of view, on the other hand, we see Shakespeare everywhere, with his generalising views, putting forward those subjects to which a general truth is inherent; it did not satisfy him that his poetry possessed a substantial matter, with which its outward form was in harmony; it was essential to him that this matter should be purely human, true, and necessary. With this matter of general value, as independent as possible of time, place, and taste, purified from everything accidental and arbitrary, Shakespeare's poetry possesses the *True*; with his inimitable gift of description and representation, of making truth sensible and comprehensible, and clothing it with the appearance of reality, it possesses the *Beautiful*, which we cannot imagine apart from the appearance; so far is the true identical with the beautiful, the idea with the ideal. The poet who gives form and appearance to the abstract and true, and he who, on the other hand, spiritualises common reality, animates matter, generalises the particular, and makes the incidental obedient to laws, both of these meet in the same operation, in the representation of the beautiful, in the union of the real and the ideal.

Thus then Shakespeare, viewed in reference to this combining of real and ideal elements, appears so many-sided that we should in vain attempt to exhaust his poetic merits by any exclusive description. Goethe has said that all synonymes, with which we distinguish art character, Hellenic and Romanic, antique and modern, Southern and Northern, objective and subjective, naïve and sentimental, natural and artificial, &c., lead back to the question as to the superiority of realistic or ideal treatment. And in fact we may demonstrate in Shakespeare that he combines in himself these two fundamental qualities, and therefore cannot be characterised exclusively by any of the other designations. There are in general very few poets that can be distinguished altogether by one of these contrasts; the balance will always lean to one side, as in Shakespeare it is always undeniably in favour of the realistic; but in no other than in him is the weight and the counterpoise so great that

in the gravity of the one the other may be easily overlooked. Regarded from different sides he is sometimes the one, sometimes the other, but in reality neither, because he is both at once. Compared with the romantic poets of the middle ages he is antique, compared with the ancients he is modern; compared with French dramatists he is the poet of nature, and with his English contemporaries he is the poet of civilisation; compared with the Spaniards he is realistic, and with the English humourists he is ideal. At one time his poetry appears to us to have flowed forth involuntarily like the popular songs, at another time to be art poetry composed with full consciousness. If Schiller declared the sign of the poet of nature to be that his work succeeded as by a lucky hit, not requiring amelioration, then Shakespeare seems to be of this class; but when we see how happily he improved his successful hit in Hamlet, we acknowledge him to be an artist who handles his subjects as an intelligent critic. According to Schiller the natural (naïve) poet is more rarely mistaken in his matter than the sentimental. Shakespeare seldom erred in this, but when he did his mistake was changed into a master-stroke; he possessed that compact nature which Goethe envied, always setting the right before him and seizing the right means. If we consider how Shakespeare takes all his materials from the world and from experience, we shall find him a poet of nature; but if we observe, on the other hand, how he gives the precious blood of his own breast for the nourishment of his children, he is a sentimental poet. If common matter (always following Schiller's distinctions) is dangerous to the natural poet, spiritual enthusiasm to the sentimental, then Shakespeare has avoided both dangers; in the former, spirit is often wanting, in the latter, subject; laxness is the usual fault of the natural poet, exaggeration of the sentimental poet: who would accuse Shakespeare of either? He unites the virtues and avoids the faults of both styles. If poetry is with the poet of nature a happy possession, with the sentimental it is a meritorious acquisition, it is in Shakespeare a possession continually increased by new acquisition. Schiller calls the drama the representative form of all art poetry. This form almost exclusively occupied our poet, who was almost exclusively the poet of nature. Even the results prove that Shakespeare combined both styles; masterpieces of the natural style, says Schiller, will be followed by imitations, which are flat copies of vulgar nature;

the masterpieces of the sentimental style will call forth fantastic productions: in England and Germany Shakespeare has, at all times, been followed by both of them. He appears everywhere happily placed between these various sides of poetic nature, not actually belonging to either. The great grasp of his mind shows him to be a poet peculiarly belonging to modern times; but if we regard the purity, naturalness, and simplicity of his art, he is like a poet of antiquity. He has given proofs that in the lyric and didactic styles, in which the moderns distinguished themselves, he was a match for them, but he concentrated himself on the highest object of poetry, on actions, like the ancients. But if we look beyond the poetry to the poet, no modern poet appears to have possessed a higher subjectivity than Shakespeare; yet in his poetry he is as objective, and as completely resigns his personality as the ancients did. He has a wealth of feelings and thoughts such as the most accomplished poet of later times could not show, but the way in which he avoids displaying the treasures of his wisdom is quite an ancient mode of self-denial; he felt the truth and beauty of things without boasting of the beauty and truth of his feelings; he sought to recognise what was great, never to appear great himself. Like the ancients he kept himself free from all pathological sympathies, from poetical partiality for certain favourite figures and objects; consequently he took up willingly, as the old dramatists did, materials that had already been used, to which he merely put the finishing touches, as the master-hand does to the rough-hewn statue. Thus he succeeded in gathering out of the shapeless materials of modern times and Northern races effects which Goethe would willingly have proved to be unattainable. Art with him does not look as if it were, what Goethe declared it to be in the North, a mere hot-house plant; it appears, in his hands, of natural growth and flourishing in tropical abundance. Goethe feigned himself inclined to declare all modern art worthless; but the worth of Shakespeare's poetry stood so gigantically before him that it made him despond. And, in fact, Shakespeare is not merely the combination of our two greatest poets, but he even surpasses them when combined, not only in matter, but in artistic nature. The extent of his matter is so immense that the poetic experience of the two Germans united, notwithstanding the superior culture of the age, is not to be compared with it. We shall find Shakespeare not only more intuitive and realistic than Schiller, but even

than Goethe, if we consider his successful command of the world of history; we shall find him not only more ideal than Goethe, but even than Schiller, if we take into consideration his much deeper spiritualisation, and his poetic comprehension of history, or when we fall back upon his moral philosophy and his human ideal. Let us finally try in Shakespeare this union of real and ideal nature, wherein Schiller recognised the highest pitch to which human nature can attain, by what follows. In almost all ages and countries the twin poets are found together, each of whom has a prevalent share in one of the opposite elements of art, the sensual and spiritual, the real and ideal; in Germany alone we had in the last century Haller and Hagedorn, Klopstock and Wieland, Lessing and Herder, in this contrast, and finally Schiller and Goethe in full consciousness of it; but Shakespeare combined these two qualities so completely that it is only in his imitators that his double nature separates; he himself has neither in his age, nor in his country, found any contrast in either direction.

After these considerations it will appear less and less strange that we give to Shakespeare, in the history of the modern drama, the same place that Homer holds in the history of the epos, that we look upon him as the sublime spring from which all the streams of dramatic poetry ought to be derived, without vainly endeavouring to carry their flow higher than the fountain-head. It remains for us to show, by a few remarks, that Shakespeare, in the times he lived in, and the country and locality in which he wrote, was not without a singularly favourable union of circumstances, which make this prominent position still more explicable. The times, very far from being a hindrance to a great poet, were actually, from lucky local and national conditions, the most propitious that modern times could offer. In a few instances they might be prejudicial to Shakespeare's poetry, but on the whole he had cause to bless his happy star. For all the conditions for making great times, and begetting and nourishing great men, lay around him, and no one will pass over this lightly who knows that even genius is not elevated above the conditions of the age, and that even the best seed requires good ground to grow in.

Everything seemed to combine to make England in the time of Elizabeth the chief inheritor of the treasures of

cultivation that Europe had won in the rich times of its regeneration in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These times and their performances were the wondrous antetype of all that our striving and fermenting present exhibits as its own property. With us everything thrives that can be accomplished without great men, without distinguished talents, and without a thoroughly penetrative culture and intellectual concentration, that can be done by the working together of many moderate powers, or that can be effected by the exercise of a one-sided mind; all that depends on technical readiness and mechanical skill. Everything that advances the externals of life, the comfort of existence, the facility of intercourse, the increase of wants, and the possibility of satisfying them; larger and larger circles of society are formed, who are to share in possession, in rights, in all that which people call fortune and civilisation. But when the question is of leading minds, who in state affairs can recognise the present necessity, and by satisfying it guide aright the bewildered instinct, who in the church by the weight of great characters seize the inimical powers of the mind by their roots and only attempt to expel them, who in art and literature are inspired to hold up a noble pattern which may allure disordered souls and vulgar passions to worthy aims, who in war display surpassing talents, winning the admiration of men—then we find ourselves, amid the many contending powers of the age, in an immense and fearful desert. How different was the frame of those times, which knew nothing of the comforts of external life, nothing of the little arts with which people develop little gifts in little coteries, in order contentedly to carry off a little renown—those times in which there was needed great merit, shining gifts, useful inventions and fruitful discoveries, if a man would overcome the difficulties of intercourse and the adverseness of time and place, in which men, therefore, were thrown back on themselves, obliged to draw all their strength from within, and, standing alone, to exert themselves for achievements which no other could accomplish in their stead! Hence arose, in remarkable abundance in all parts of the world, those great characters and creative geniuses, swelling with individual strength, whose outbursts of spirit now testified to a youthfulness and luxuriance of resources, now to a sincerity, modesty, and depth of unostentatious culture, which merits the admiration of all time. When, amid the stream of men of learning in Italy, antiquity

was revived so that the spirit of Plato walked abroad and inspired new scholars; when in the Netherlands humanistic learning struck its roots, and the great work of school reform began; when Germany was shaken out of sleep by her reformer, who gave a shock to the might of Rome, and purified religion and morals; when the bold navigators of Genoa and Portugal opened the way to the Indies, and cast a light upon the extent of earth; when the Spanish conquerors, as if in sport, laid new kingdoms at the feet of their sovereigns; when Charles V. and Philip II. united the civilised and uncivilised world; when Machiavelli created anew history and state policy, and politicians arose in his school who laid open to the human mind a long disused region of activity; when Copernicus and Galileo penetrated into the mysteries of the heavens; when Italy snatched from Greece the monopoly of the plastic arts, and Palestrina became a reformer in music, and Ariosto gave to his generation a new conception of poetry; in all this we behold a primitive world of creative power, in which the eminence of one genius disappears, or becomes common amid the abundance of the like all round him. These were the times of which Bacon proudly said their symbol was, in opposition to the known sayings of the ancients, the *plus ultra*, the *imitabile fulmen*, and, what surpasses all admiration, even the *imitabile cœlum*, since ships, like the heavenly bodies, compassed the earth, and even traversed more intricate pathways.

But the immense excitement of the 150 years from the fall of Constantinople to Shakespeare's prime, proved in its fruits and results of essential advantage to the Teutonic races, to their states, and their intellectual progress—races which, in contrast to the middle ages, were to give laws and form to this later era. Italy had at that time exhausted all the luxury of her inward powers, and Spain all the exuberance of her outward strength, and neither had arrived at a true national prosperity; in Italy the burden of ecclesiastical and secular despotism had crushed all efforts of mind without profit to people or state; in Spain, on the other hand, it had crushed those of national power without advantage to mental culture. But in the northern Teutonic lands all the fruitful results of this period crowded together, and here, under the influence of free religion, free political schemes were developed, and a civilisation which promised long continuance. Again in the circle of those Teutonic lands everything seemed to turn in favour of England

alone. Germany was too exclusively occupied with the work of religion for state and art and knowledge not to suffer from it; the Netherlands were involved in too unequal a struggle for the full ripeness of the state not to be somewhat delayed. But in England all that former times had prepared in scattered places and peoples appeared to be united under Elizabeth. Whilst in Italy and Germany the growth of literature and political power, the works of peace and war, were at variance, and the one excluded the other, in England they were linked together. It was for this that Bacon extolled the happiness of Elizabeth in the same sense as in the play of Henry VIII., as a princess under whose rule the prosperity of the country appeared all the more brilliant in contrast to the misery and misfortune of its neighbours, under whom the blessings of peace and the honours of war were united; when England stood like the wall of Europe against the ascendency of Spain, when English armies were victorious in Ireland and fought in Belgium, France, and Scotland, when fleets waged war on the coasts of Spain, and voyages were undertaken round the world, to India, and to the North-West passage. Elizabeth gathered around her men such as England, according to Bacon's testimony, had not before produced; she maintained her own position in such society, not with that facility, says Bacon, with which in the barbarous ages men were as easy to rule as herds of cattle, but with the highest gifts of mind and character, without which in this highly cultivated age it was impossible to become distinguished. Among these men was Bacon himself, who, through the confused chaos of mediæval alchemy, designed the method which in our own day has been carried out in natural science; among them too were Spenser and Sidney, who enchanted with their language and poetry, a Raleigh, who carried off the palm both in arms and learning, a statesman like Burleigh, a historian like Camden, a merchant like Gresham, naval heroes like Howard and Drake, not to speak of many of a second rank. In many of these minds, as in our Shakespeare, we perceive the delight they felt in belonging to so exciting a period, which suffered no stagnation of life, and to so happy a state, in which no public disgrace crippled individuals, and no religious despotism oppressed their minds. The conflict with scholastic philosophy and religious fanaticism was not indeed over, yet Shakespeare as well as Bacon came at a precious moment of mental freedom, *after* the struggle with Catholicism and

its issue, and *before* that with the fanaticism of the other party—the Puritans; and he could raise his head free from the prejudices which 300 years have not healed. Shakespeare could thus in his poetry, even at that time, give to the age that which we first received from the great work of our German poets of the last century—the basis of a natural mode of feeling, thought, and life, upon which art prospers in its purest form. In many respects the age itself was in this beneficial to the poet. It maintained a happy medium between crudeness and vitiated taste; life was not insipid and colourless as it is nowadays; men still ventured to appear what they were; there was still poetry in reality. Our German poets, in an age of rouge and powder, of hoops and wigs, of stiff manners, rigid proprieties, narrow society, and cold impulses, had indescribable trouble in struggling out of this dulness and deformity, which they had first to conquer in themselves before they could discern and contend for what was better. In Shakespeare's time nature had not yet become extinct; the age was just halting on the threshold of these distorted views of false civilisation; and if our poet had indeed to combat against the first approaches of the disease, he was yet entirely sound and free from it himself. He had the immense advantage of being one with his age and not at variance with it; when he sought materials for his poetry he need not, like our painters, dive into past worlds, restore lost creeds, worship fallen gods, and imitate foreign works of art—from his national soil he drew the power which makes his poetry unrivalled. The poets of the middle ages lived in too strong a hierarchical rule to be able with their limited knowledge of history to succeed in placing their own minds on the same level with the spirit of the age; hence in those times they grappled with ideas too great for them, which they could not bring into form, and the feeling of inability is stamped on all mediæval poetry. It was quite otherwise in the little insular England, where the dawning self-reliance of the people of itself drew the poet to live in and with and for his nation, and to reflect the image of the age in his works. It is the reverse in the present day, when the acquaintance of every art and nation has conquered all time and space for the poet, and has brought the materials of all ages into too close contact with him for him to link his poems and aspirations so intimately with a national life. And the result was this, that often our best German poems found only a

small number of readers, because the tenor of the age and the people was no longer identical with the poet, because he willingly renounced them. But it was not so with Shakespeare and his countryman Bacon; with willing modesty they regarded themselves only as a part in the great whole of their highly advanced age, and in his proudest controversy with the errors of the time, Bacon declared that his works were rather the fruit of his age than of his genius.

This freshness of the intellectual instinct among the Teutonic races in the age generally, this prime of the national life of England in particular, explains to us, therefore, how at a time when there was no poet in the other Teutonic families, and when in England itself an unpopular Italian poetry was in vogue, Shakespeare was able for the first time to raise the Teutonic taste and to ennoble a national branch of art. That the distinct transition from the Southern taste in poetry to the Teutonic took place precisely in England is as little a matter of chance, as that it was precisely in the drama that England afforded such important services. The English people are a combination of French Normans and German Saxons, the language itself is compounded from both elements; in the middle ages its entire poetry went hand in hand with Italian art; since Shakespeare it follows the Teutonic taste of modern times. How Shakespeare, in his lyrical and descriptive poems, did homage to the formal mannerism of the Italian poetry, how in his early dramas he adhered to it, and subsequently relinquished it, we have before amply pointed out. The assurance with which he gave up that false mannerism, and thereby marked the great turning-point in the direction of taste from the Italian to the more modern style, is only to be compared with the decision with which, in the great confusion of styles, amid the continuance of epos in Italy, the prevalence of pastoral poetry throughout Europe, the taste for frivolous tales and the imitation of the classics emanating from France, he seized the drama as the only style suited to the spirit of the age, and without wavering irresolutely here and there, as Goethe, he suffered the bias of the time to determine his direction and career, and the splendour of the Atalantan apple could not allure him from it. We call the drama the normal species of poetry for this later age, not only because, as we before said, something to elevate and attract the senses was necessary for a public who could no longer listen to rhapsodies nor be satisfied with mere hearing,

but especially because the stage was the only place where all ranks were gathered round art, because this species alone took poetry from the learned and aristocratic circles, and placed it before the most widespread public, where greatness better thrives, and because it restored poetry to the whole people; this is the decisive token in any matter of its suitability to the spirit of the age. To have perceived this is a merit which indeed Hans Sachs and Lope de Vega, the one before, the other contemporary with Shakespeare, may claim; but to have made laws for the drama and to have given it a higher value is Shakespeare's own greatness. The age favoured him in this from another side also. He appeared at that auspicious moment in which the drama had in England already obtained acceptance and love, when the sympathy of the people was most alive, and when, on the other hand, the public were not yet corrupted and excited by over-sensibility, and when the opera, which deteriorated the drama, was not yet in existence. He took that in hand which most actively engaged the spirit of the people, and he carried it through progressive steps to a consummation beyond which there was nothing possible but retrogression.

Thus favoured by the age, the drama, as we before said, with regard to locality also, was in its right place in England, where it could spring into life complete like an armed Pallas; the advantage of concentration, which England at that time drew from the general circumstances of the period, was brought to bear in a remarkable manner upon this branch of art. France and Italy in their chivalric epic poems had exhausted their national poetic powers; France had furnished the matter for these epics; Italy had added in the sixteenth century the finished form. When in poetry the transition from the epos to the drama took place, Italy made only feeble attempts in the sixteenth century to revive the Latin comedy; France, following in the footsteps of the classics, created an artificial tragedy, which Italy subsequently imitated. Both countries have had a national epos, which led in Italy to the revival of the old rhapsodists, but they have had no popular drama of great perfection. Spain and England, on the other hand, have no independent epos, but only chivalric romances borrowed from France and Italy. Their romances and ballads never formed themselves into larger epopees, they remained separate, and appear as the first rhapsodical opening of the drama; in Spain, in a great measure, they gave the drama its matter and even its colouring.

In both countries, as an equivalent for the lacking epos, a popular stage was formed, such as other nations of modern times have never possessed. Between these two countries Germany held a middle course. It had a popular epos, but it remained uncultivated; it had a drama, but it was only developed slowly, by fits and starts, amid interruptions, and with no concentration as to time and place, and therefore it never attained to the brilliant perfection of the Spanish and English theatres. The sixteenth century witnessed a certain degree of theatrical progress in Nüremberg, the seventeenth in Silesia, the eighteenth throughout Germany; the formation of the stage extends here over three centuries; in Spain on the contrary the popular cultivation of the drama is concentrated within one century, and in England, circling round Shakespeare, within even fifty years. In Germany it sought doubtfully after a place of nurture and found none; in Spain it left the provincial cities for the little Madrid, only lately chosen as the capital; in England it was concentrated within the one great capital, where it had to fight for its existence in that hard contest which called forth its highest powers. Judge then how natural it was that England, if not the birthplace of the drama, should be that of dramatic legislature. Yet even this instance of favourable concentration is not the last. Both in philosophy and poetry everything conspired, as it were, throughout this prosperous period, in favour of two great minds, Shakespeare and Bacon; all competitors vanished from their side, and they could give forth laws for art and science which it is incumbent even upon present ages to fulfil. As the revived philosophy, which in the former century in Germany was divided among many, but in England at that time was the possession of a single man, so poetry also found one exclusive heir, compared with whom those later born could claim but little.

That Shakespeare's appearance upon a soil so admirably prepared was neither marvellous nor accidental is evidenced even by the corresponding appearance of such a contemporary as Bacon. Scarcely can anything be said of Shakespeare's position generally with regard to mediæval poetry which does not also bear upon the position of the renovator Bacon with regard to mediæval philosophy. Neither knew nor mentioned the other, although Bacon was almost called upon to have done so in his remarks upon the theatre of his day. It may be presumed that Shakespeare liked Bacon but little, if he knew his writings and

life, that he liked not his ostentation, which, without on the whole interfering with his modesty, recurred too often in many instances; that he liked not the fault-finding which his ill-health might have caused, nor the narrow-mindedness with which he pronounced the histrionic art to be infamous, although he allowed that the ancients regarded the drama as a school for virtue; nor the theoretic precepts of worldly wisdom which he gave forth; nor, lastly, the practical career which he lived. Before his mind, however, if he had fathomed it, he must have bent in reverence. For just as Shakespeare was an interpreter of the secrets of history and of human nature, Bacon was an interpreter of lifeless nature. Just as Shakespeare went from instance to instance in his judgment of moral actions, and never founded a law on single experience, so did Bacon in natural science avoid leaping from one experience of the senses to general principles; he spoke of this with blame as anticipating nature; and Shakespeare, in the same way, would have called the conventionalities in the poetry of the Southern races an anticipation of human nature. In the scholastic science of the middle ages, as in the chivalric poetry of the romantic period, approbation and not truth was sought for, and with one accord Shakespeare's poetry and Bacon's science were equally opposed to this. As Shakespeare balanced the one-sided errors of the imagination by reason, reality, and nature, so Bacon led philosophy away from the one-sided errors of reason to experience; both, with one stroke, renovated the two branches of science and poetry by this renewed bond with nature; both, disregarding all by-ways, staked everything upon this 'victory in the race between art and nature.' Just as Bacon with his new philosophy is linked with the natural science of Greece and Rome, and then with the latter period of philosophy in western Europe, so Shakespeare's drama stands in relation to the comedies of Plautus and to the stage of his own day; between the two there lay a vast wilderness of time, as unfruitful for the drama as for philosophy. But while they thus led back to nature, Bacon was yet as little of an empiric, in the common sense, as Shakespeare was a poet of nature. Bacon prophesied that if hereafter his commendation of experience should prevail, great danger to science would arise from the other extreme, and Shakespeare even in his own day could perceive the same with respect to his poetry; Bacon, therefore, insisted on the closest union between experience and reason, just as Shakespeare

effected that between reality and imagination. While they thus bid adieu to the formalities of ancient art and science, Shakespeare to conceits and taffeta-phrases, Bacon to logic and syllogisms, yet at times it occurred that the one fell back into the subtleties of the old school, and the other into the constrained wit of the Italian style. Bacon felt himself quite an original in that which was his peculiar merit, and so was Shakespeare: the one in the method of science he had laid down, and in his suggestions for its execution, the other in the poetical works he had executed, and in the suggestions of their new law. Bacon, looking back to the waymarks he had left for others, said with pride that his words required a century for their demonstration and several for their execution; and so too it has demanded two centuries to understand Shakespeare, but very little has ever been executed in his sense. And at the same time we have mentioned what deep modesty was interwoven in both with their self-reliance, so that the words which Bacon liked to quote hold good for the two works:—'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.' Both reached this height from the one starting-point, that Shakespeare despised the million, and Bacon feared with Phocion the applause of the multitude. Both are alike in the rare impartiality with which they avoided everything one-sided; in Bacon we find, indeed, youthful exercises in which he endeavoured in severe contrasts to contemplate a series of things from two points of view. Both, therefore, have an equal hatred of sects and parties; Bacon of sophists and dogmatic philosophers, Shakespeare of Puritans and zealots. Both, therefore, are equally free from prejudices, and from astrological superstition in dreams and omens. Bacon says of the alchemists and magicians in natural science that they stand in similar relation to true knowledge as the deeds of Amadis to those of Cæsar, and so does Shakespeare's true poetry stand in relation to the fantastic romance of Amadis. Just as Bacon banished religion from science, so did Shakespeare from art; and when the former complained that the teachers of religion were against natural philosophy, they were equally against the stage. From Bacon's example it seems clear that Shakespeare left religious matters unnoticed on the same grounds as himself, and took the path of morality in worldly things; in both this has been equally misconstrued, and Le Maistre has proved Bacon's lack of Christianity, as Birch

has done that of Shakespeare. Shakespeare would, perhaps, have looked down just as contemptuously on the ancients and their arts as Bacon did on their philosophy and natural science, and both on the same grounds; they boasted of the greater age of the world, of more enlarged knowledge of heaven, earth, and mankind. Neither stooped before authorities, and an injustice similar to that which Bacon committed against Aristotle, Shakespeare *perhaps* has done to Homer. In both a similar combination of different mental powers was at work; and as Shakespeare was often involuntarily philosophical in his profoundness, Bacon was not seldom surprised into the imagination of the poet. Just as Bacon, although he declared knowledge in itself to be much more valuable than the use of invention, insisted throughout generally and dispassionately upon the practical use of philosophy, so Shakespeare's poetry, independent as was his sense of art, aimed throughout at bearing upon the moral life. Bacon himself was of the same opinion; he was not far from declaring history to be the best teacher of politics, and poetry the best instructor in morals. Both were alike deeply moved by the picture of a ruling Nemesis, whom they saw, grand and powerful, striding through history and life, dragging the mightiest and most prosperous as a sacrifice to her altar, as the victims of their own inward nature and destiny. In Bacon's works we find a multitude of moral sayings and maxims of experience, from which the most striking mottoes might be drawn for every Shakespearian play, aye, for every one of his principal characters (we have already brought forward not a few proofs of this), testifying to a remarkable harmony in their mutual comprehension of human nature. Both, in their systems of morality rendering homage to Aristotle, whose ethics Shakespeare, from a passage in Troilus, may have read, arrived at the same end as he did—that virtue lies in a just medium between two extremes. Shakespeare would have also agreed with *him* in this, that Bacon declared excess to be 'the fault of youth, as defect is of age;' he accounted 'defect the worst, because excess contains some sparks of magnanimity, and, like a bird, claims kindred of the heavens, while defect, only like a base worm, crawls upon the earth.' In these maxims lie at once, as it were, the whole theory of Shakespeare's dramatic forms and of his moral philosophy.

From our last position we pass on to a few discussions upon *the moral spirit* of Shakespeare's works. Upon this point, also, so many objections have been raised, that it might appear more paradoxical to regard the poet as a moral guide than as a poetical law-giver. Not to mention how often, in this respect also, single expressions and speeches have been the stumbling-block, Johnson has reproached our dramatist in the severest manner with the fault, 'to which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men:' that he has sacrificed virtue to convenience, that he seems to write without any moral purpose, that he makes no just distribution of good or evil, and carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong. Nor are these wholly obsolete views. As late as 1848 a work appeared by Birch upon Shakespeare's religion and philosophy, inveighing against 'that German mysticism' which sets up Shakespeare as an article of faith, while he rather ought with one consent to be called graceless and faithless; a book in which it is endeavoured to be proved that Shakespeare surpassed Marlowe and Greene in free-thinking, atheism, and profanity, and had learned Lucretian frivolity and a derision of religion from Boccaccio and the like. In plain words, the poet is here made responsible for the language of his characters. Because Aaron denies God and Autolycus immortality, Shakespeare denies them also; because Henry V. addresses to Falstaff the words of Christ: 'I know thee not!' Shakespeare is a blasphemer; and when Timon in his frantic misanthrophy exclaims, 'Spare not the babe—think it a bastard!' Shakespeare has alluded to Herod's murder of the infants and has called Christ a bastard! We may decide for ourselves whether stupidity or the perfidy of priest-like zeal dictated this book, which would have been too bad even for Puritanical times; for Gosson and his like are here surpassed.

Blindness such as this corrects itself. We do not therefore direct these remarks to oppose it, but only to add to the importance of our testimony, so that even these zealots, in spite of their blindness, must bear witness to the moral spirit of Shakespeare's works. Even Birch himself cannot help acknowledging that there lies within our poet a deep benevolence and that natural love which in healthy natures outweighs other passions; that just so, countless times in his characters, he brings out this natural goodness of the human heart in contrast to its natural evil; that he builds a system of morality upon

nature and reason, a system independent of religious considerations, because he believed the laws of morality to be written plainly enough on the tablet of the human heart. And just so did Johnson confess that a system of social duty may be selected from Shakespeare; but he thought that its principles only occasionally escaped him. Had he conscientiously examined the matter, it would have happened to him with respect to morals, even more than with respect to æsthetics, as before with Alcibiades, who, when he had penetrated through the ugly exterior of his Socrates, and had raised the veil from his inner life, discovered a fulness of unsuspected beauty.

It is true Shakespeare never aims at preaching morals by express and direct precept. He does it for the most part indirectly by the mouth of the least prejudiced, by the spectators rather than by the actors in his plays. And this moreover only in tragedy, where dazzling passions vacillate between vice and virtue, and where it was necessary to prevent a misconception; in comedy, where he endeavoured rather to amuse than to exert the mind, it would have been prejudicial to the design of his art had he added severe lectures to the picture of folly, which is in itself represented in a ridiculous aspect. If Shakespeare thus, taking Johnson's words literally, seems to write with no moral aim, this very appearance is the triumph of his art. For art is not intended to proclaim moral truth by direct teaching, but by living, acting impulses, by illustration and example. This touching of the heart is far more adapted than the cold language to the head to teach us to feel delight and disgust in right and wrong, and to develop in us that true self-love which strives to make the good and the beautiful its own. There is no more fruitless branch in all literature than moral philosophy; except perhaps those dramatic moralities into whose frigid defects poetry will always sink whenever it aims at direct moral teaching, and degrades itself as the medium of this. For it follows upon this that all action, the true object of art, disappears, and that in all characters and speeches we look for examples and traits of morality such as men like Birch desire, who lament the decline of the mysteries and moralities under Shakespeare's worldly art. *This method* of morality was far from Shakespeare's object; yet *morality* was as much his object as poetry itself. If they had told him of the new theories, which would emancipate poetry from morality, he would not have understood them, because *his* poetry was

designed to represent the substance of active life, because, this substance being of a wholly moral nature, morality is consequently utterly inseparable from true poetry. If they had pointed out to him the manner of Southern poetry, which aspired after formal and outward beauty, he would have turned away from this attractive shallowness, as he indeed involuntarily did even in his descriptive poems. If they had held before him the modern poems, which Goethe styled the 'literature of despondency,' in which vice celebrates its triumphs, he would have cast them from him with æsthetic as well as moral abhorrence —*he*, who called evil a 'deformity' and virtue 'beauty.' Shakespeare's poetry is moral, his poetic impulse, therefore, is inseparably interwoven with his ethical feelings, because he took life as a whole, and was himself a whole man, in whom the moral, æsthetic, and intellectual qualities were separated by no speculative analysis; and his art is therefore so great because, out of this whole, he absorbed into *himself* more of the moral element of life than any other has done, not even excepting the ancients. To knit poetry to life by this moral cement, to sacrifice the outer beauty to the higher morality when the mirror was to be held up to life, to exhibit to the age in this mirror no æsthetic flattering picture, but a moral picture of unvarnished truth—this is throughout the express aim of Shakespeare's poetry; and he followed it with such deep earnestness, that to this we must look for the reason why his poetry had so wholly different an influence to that of our own Schiller and Goethe, which excited rather to poetry and to poetry alone than to a hearty sympathy with the world.

The relation of Shakespeare's poetry to morality and to moral influence upon men is most perfect; in this respect, from Aristotle to Schiller, nothing higher has been asked of poetry than that which Shakespeare rendered. If Bacon felt the lack of a science of human passions, he rightly thought that historians and poets supplied this science, and he might well have searched for this science before all in his neighbour Shakespeare; for no other poetry has taught as his has done, by reminders and warnings, that the taming of the passions is the aim of human civilisation. If it would not cripple its own effect upon this aim, it might not venture to teach express morals; for the mere knowledge of good and evil has little influence upon human passions. *One* noble impulse does more towards the ennobling of men than a hundred good precepts,

and a bad passion is best subdued by the excitement of a better. If the most desirable end in the moral perfection of men be this—that impulse and passion within us should not be abandoned to the blind constraint of nature, but also not to the severe direction of imperative law, that the sharp contrast between an iron duty done for duty's sake and the sweet incentives of nature should be softened, that the oppression of the senses by excessive mental control and the loss of inward freedom by the blind dominion of inclination should be equally checked, that passion should be moderated by reason; and, on the other hand, that that recognised as reasonable should be elevated into an impulse, so that the power of passion should remain, not unemployed, but harmless, that thus the man should arrive at that completeness in which reason and passion, sense and mind, should be united in the well-regulated inner precincts of the soul in one allied, never-conflicting activity—then will poetry ever be the most effective guide to this end; for 'serious maxims frighten a man away from that which he endures in sport,' and therefore Schiller exhorted the poet thus to lay hold of men's minds. If art is to reach this end, it matters not that this ideal combination of those powers, which are generally at variance within us, should be represented as complete in the characters, but only that, in the course and issue of the actions represented, this balance should always stand out as the healthful aim of human efforts; in other words, that the poet in the background of his work should keep his own mind fixed upon their union. Of no poet perhaps can this high praise be pronounced with such certainty as of Shakespeare, He battled, like Goethe, for nature, for the natural rights of the heart, against the pedantry of propriety, and Puritanical austerity, and mental error; he battled, on the other hand, like Schiller, for freedom of mind, for moderation and discipline, against the common enemy of man, the excess of the passions; nowhere has he depicted, like Schiller, the heroes of a superhuman sense of duty, but equally nowhere has he wantonly speculated upon the sensuality and levity of men. No man has been so well acquainted with human passions, has represented them so apparently without expedient and effort, has known so thoroughly how to awaken and check them in the spectator, has so taught by the mastering of the passions represented to master those of life. Successfully to depict a strong passion demands experience and knowledge of the passion

itself. But to combine with this possession that high self-command and inward balance which maintains itself free from real influence in the delineation, this it is which alone is the token of an ideal mind created for poetry. Never do we find in Shakespeare that his hand is affected by the passion of which he writes, a thing so common among many modern poets, who are only the product of their own passions. And when he gives the rein to the wildest passion, it is a grand and beautiful sight to see how he himself is not carried away by it, and how, knowing its breed and race, he masters it to the yoke of his art, makes the unbridled still wilder by call and whip, and at the same time understands how to tame and guide it by a glance. He is never Icarus with him for whom he forges the wings; he is never Phaëton with him to whom he lends the steed; but towards his unruly children he is ever Phœbus in love and Jupiter in punishment.

Possessing this property of perfect self-command, our poet never falls into the fault of even our great modern poets, of investing passion or weakness with attractions which might captivate us and lead us morally astray; far rather it was his natural talent, as it was his aim, in accordance with Aristotle's law, to make his dramas tend to the purification of the passions. According to Aristotle's well-known precept, the action of the tragedy ought to be of that nature that it should excite fear and sympathy, and by this means should purify these and similar emotions of the mind. This law Shakespeare satisfied in a manner utterly removed from all trivialities, in a manner never to be surpassed. He would have deprecated the idea of comparing, as Bacon did, the poet's control of passion and the emotions of terror in the tragedy with the administration of reward and punishment in the state; his aim was never, in this clumsy manner, to excite the fear of the spectator, and his disgust at the excess of passion, essentially by emphasising the outward misfortunes which this excess involves; the nobler fear which *he* aimed at is awakened in the spectator long before the issue, even throughout the giddy path of senseless passion, throughout the objective development of the blindly excited powers of our mind. This suspense of fear is intended to heighten our feelings and tender sensibility as to the choice of the right way; we are intended as spectators to learn from the drama to note more quickly, more sensitively, the beginning of the false way; that we may walk more circumspectly in our own drama of life; the

passion thus expending itself before us is designed like an alarum at once to awaken watchfulness of our own souls. And thus, when the poet claims our compassion, he does not aim merely at an impulse of tender emotion and sympathy with those who suffer under the punishment of their self-created fate; much rather does he intend to unite with the fear of the dangerous course of passion, at once that sympathy with the bold, the great, and the estimable in this course, with all that which Bacon discovered in the strong outburst of passion to be kindred with Heaven. That this excitement of fear and sympathy would operate indeed for the purifying of our passions is certainly indisputable. The objectivity with which the picture of human passion is placed before us in the drama, which leads us to contemplate the latent and dark powers within us, and brings them actively and intelligently before our minds, must necessarily produce an elevation of our consciousness as well as of our self-reliance, and with this a raising and purifying of the soul is necessarily linked, provided we are at all susceptible of impression of so noble a kind. Only see any Shakespearian drama even tolerably represented, and upon every sound mind it will make this highest impression of a work of art, that aimed at by the Aristotelian law, and which Schiller has so well developed in carrying out that law; it transports us to that intermediate state between doing and suffering, in which, unconstrained, we are affected by both; in which we maintain the freedom of determining for ourselves as we will, in which we are not weakened as by pleasures of the senses nor overstrained as by those of the mind, but feel ourselves entirely masters of our own powers, and able to pass from it to every work equally skilful, with a lofty equanimity of mind. In such a frame of mind will every riper drama of Shakespeare's leave us, and the strongest of his works will affect the strongest men the most. Looking down from the watch-tower of his art, life appears more easy and capable of conquest; and if the great truth of his delineations shows us the actual world not in poetic sunshine, but overcast with manifold clouds, the poet has also given us the means and the position by which we may find new beauties and charms even in these stormy elements of life.

If there be this moral influence in Shakespeare's poetry, if it be so imbued with morality that a kind of system of worldly wisdom can be drawn from it, it may be asked, how, amid the numberless, endlessly contradictory, characteristic expres-

sions of his figures, can his own opinion be with certainty discovered?

We might reply that the opinions which are most frequently on the lips of his purer characters, and are repeated at every opportunity, point out the basis of the poet's mode of thought, and because they are so predominant in his mind they must be most his own. But in saying this we should not go far enough. It is indeed difficult to reach the very root of his more important characters on account of their combination of qualities, but much more difficult to fathom himself, who, as it were, is again combined out of all these characters united. It is more essential for us to consider the ideal characters which Shakespeare has sustained in a medium between the strong tragic and weak comic figures of his pieces; and the suggestions we have given with respect to Henry, Posthumus, Orlando, and the like, must not be lost sight of in this investigation. But the main path lies in the consideration of the dramatic styles and their relation to each other, and then in the moral justice which is displayed in the development of the actions. We have, in Shakespeare, not a teacher before us who endeavoured simply to solve the enigmas of the world, but the world itself with its riddles is reflected to our view; all chance, however, is removed; the moving spring of the actions, and the necessity of the fate which they evolve, are discovered to us; we must watch the mechanism thus displayed; and, pondering upon it, we learn to understand the mind of the master-regulator.

The ancients, who represented in their tragedies only the hero world and in their comedies the real and the present, obtained by this contrast a very pure division of *the forms of the drama*. Their tragedy contains no sort of comic element. The exclusion of the serious from comedy showed itself on the other hand more impracticable, because art everywhere requires to be raised above the vulgar. Even in Aristophanes a sublime lyric and the solemn seriousness of political precept appear amid the comic action; but it was the comedies of Menander which first blended the cheerful with the serious emotions of life. *These* became in the hands of Terence and Plautus the school of the new drama. For this in truth developed itself rather out of the burlesque comedies of the people than out of the mysteries, and

the comedies of Plautus helped throughout in its formation. Tragedy and its development came chronologically after comedy; it thus sprung up from the ground of comedy, from actual life, and not as among the ancients side by side with an heroic epos. Real life, with all its vicissitudes of good and ill, joy and sorrow, jest and earnest, was introduced into the drama of every kind; the names became confused; in Spain everything was uniformly called comedy; in England the distinction of tragedy, comedy, and history was customary, according as the issue was good or bad, the story true or invented. Shakespeare must soon have perceived that these distinctions were neither real nor in accordance with the rules of art; in Love's Labour's Lost he ridiculed the deciding mark of the issue, and through Polonius the attempts to define the different styles by their matter. His view appeared to be that every subject requires its own form, and every piece so far forms with him a style of its own; therefore is it that he has so often disregarded the line of demarcation between comedy, pastoral, masques, and histories. Whilst he thus took life alone as a guide, gave to every event its own right and law, and suffered the matter itself to dictate the course, the form, and the tone, he was met throughout by one radical difference between the luxuriant and stunted growth of passion and active power in men, and this led him universally to adhere to the traditional notions of comedy and tragedy. But between the two he admitted a middle kind of *spectacle* (*das Schauspiel*), a special form of the drama, known to every age and people, but for which the German tongue alone has a distinct appellation. These principal styles he blended together according to necessity; and this procedure was itself a necessity resulting from the laws of his art. For if moral ideas are to be the leading points of the drama, and these can only be rendered perceptible to the senses by characters and their contrasts, it follows that these very contrasts will lead in tragedy to comic elements, and in comedy to tragic ones. Shakespeare too admitted this combination of jest and earnest in consequence of his pure human nature, which took equal interest in everything, and which, in the very exclusion of one-sided barriers, saw perfection in the utmost possible variety. He admitted this combination moreover in consequence of his genuine Teutonic nature; for our race, unlike the ancients and those of Southern birth, has rarely loved the sudden change in scenic representations of allowing the amusement of burlesque and masque to

succeed tragic convulsions; we like not this obliterating of the one glaring impression by another, but rather the blending together of the tones. In this method it matters only that this change of means, effects, and tones should be in reality blended, and that no ill-timed discords should disturb the harmony of the drama. In this respect Johnson has already vindicated the conduct of our poet with intelligence and skill. He met the objection against this blending, namely, that the action would be robbed of the power of motion by the interruption of passion, simply by this, that he appealed to daily experience to testify how groundless the objection was. Clumsy actors can certainly so abuse the gravediggers in Hamlet, and the fool in Lear, as to destroy the tragic impression. The intelligent, on the contrary, will draw precious advantage from these parts, softening the impression of horror, and resolving the discord of the comic contrast into a refreshing harmony. We have pointed out in detail wherein the ground lies that the comic characters and episodes in the serious drama and the reverse have nowhere in Shakespeare anything disturbing and inharmonious: because they always stand in close relation to the idea of the piece, because they are brought forward as contrasts or as faint reflections of the ruling passion, because as foil, counterpart, or distorted image, they serve for shading and colouring the main picture. Shakespeare *took* this practice from the first most popular and unconscious beginnings of comedy. Even in its crudest commencement the popular comedy had, with a happy instinct, assigned here and there to the fool the part of the comic chorus. Thus in the Spanish drama the parodying of the main action was quite in vogue; and the Grazioso has throughout the talent and the task given him to penetrate, like Shakespeare's clowns, unconcernedly in his simplicity, all that which the principal characters in their passionate excitement neither see, hear, nor feel. No one who knows this will therefore find anything extravagant or imaginary in our explanation of these comic episodes in Shakespeare. Moreover, we repeat that in this practice of combination Shakespeare maintains throughout a moderation full of tact. In tragedy and tragic history Shakespeare never introduced comic episodes, but only single characters in passing scenes, and even these of late in less number; burlesque parodies of serious actions only appear in comedy; and the combination of tragic and comic situations only in those plays which we designate as *Schauspiele*, and in

such comedies as verge closely on the seriousness of the *Schauspiel*.

We have already before shown how simple the classification of Shakespeare's dramatic style is, and how it at once leads to his fundamental views concerning moral things. We there said that the poet sees man at his height when he has attained to that even balance of nature upon which is founded the man's noble feeling of his worth and vocation, that true self-love which is the root of all good. Such characters, we remarked, he introduces in dramas (*Schauspiele*) which possess the serious turn of the tragedy and the cheerful conclusion of the comedy. This kind of drama was known even by Aristotle. He spoke of it contemptuously, as we also in the present day are wont to do, because indeed too often by the over-honest and upright justness with which it leads the good to happiness and the bad to harm, it favours the weaknesses of those weak ones to please whom even Shakespeare's Romeo has been converted into a drama of this kind. Aristotle and Shakespeare have no name for this form of drama; the one calls it tragedy, and designates it as belonging to the tendency of the comedy; the other calls it comedy, but the characters and arrangement are tragic, and the catastrophe threatens to become so also. The Tempest, the Merchant of Venice, Henry IV. and V., Cymbeline, Measure for Measure, all belong to this class, and a series of comedies besides in their serious parts, comedies in which not tragic events and characters terminate tragically, nor the ridiculous ridiculously, but the serious seriously. It is certainly not, as Aristotle remarked, the enjoyment belonging to the tragedy or comedy which this style aims at; but this does not prevent this species of drama from being regarded among us as a middle style whose title is in nowise to be denied. Who would not regard even Goethe's 'Iphigenia,' Schiller's 'Tell,' the 'Orestiads,' or Cymbeline as most legitimate works of art. This style is certainly more easily liable than others to degenerate, but even this cannot exclude it from its right of competition. From the exact distribution of justice, the way is readily opened for too strong a contrast between good and evil; this form of drama is that in which the *misère* of citizen life has liked best to insinuate itself; it changes easily to the pathetic, in which the innocent suffers without the support of mental power, or it sets up pictures of infallible virtue, in which we perceive an adherence to duty in action which seems to spring from insensibility. These faults

and platitudes do not, however, necessarily belong to this form of drama; Shakespeare at least is entirely a stranger to them. He has not placed his Henry and Posthumus in such a pure moral atmosphere that others cannot breathe in it, nor on a height whose distance discourages us; he has depicted their moral nature in conflict, victory, and defeat, so that their weakness brings them near to us, and their strength draws us up to them; they show us not only, as the tragic characters do, that right action *is possible*, but also *actual*.

Between the erring natures of tragedy and comedy a middle class of being appears here, characters out of the tragic sphere, with strong passions, but endowed with that inner self-command which softens the severe collisions of tragedy, which gives not up to passion, which overcomes errors within and without, and disarms the threatenings of fate. It is extraordinarily ingenious how Shakespeare has exhibited his characters of this stamp, his Henry in covenant with the Deity, his Posthumus under the protection of the gods, at any rate in the manner in which he has arranged it that the saving hand of a genius watches over them, as Portia over Antonio, the Duke over Angelo, Helena over Bertram; they bear in themselves the natural attractions which gain such clear-seeing protecting angels for friends, whilst the tragic characters are abandoned by God, by their fellow-creatures, and by themselves. If we were to designate the task of art to be that of leading to that purity and harmony of nature, the just limitation of the strong impulses in men, we may say that tragedy and comedy, in the delineation of the contrary, do this rather in a negative, and the drama (*das Schauspiel*) more in a positive manner; and we see not why this should not be just as admissible. In this latter form it only matters that when lower types of character are employed it should approach nearer to comedy, and when higher characters are introduced it should rank closer to tragedy. Shakespeare has maintained this line of distinction with irreproachable nicety and assurance.

In the tragic characters, on the contrary, that happy equipoise of human nature and of its fundamental impulses is disturbed and broken; the just self-love of the man rises into egotism, ambition, and all those uncontrolled passions which lead to an unhappy end. Wherever tragedy has most surely grasped its aim, it has always depicted an overbearing race of men, who set themselves up in bold defiance of the powers of heaven, exaggerate reliance upon human strength, and suffer

themselves in the fearful consequences of passion to be hurried on to a disregard of divine and human laws; men who demand more scope for their pretensions in society than is compatible with the rights of others, and who therefore are wrecked by the force of natural reaction, thus preparing their outward fate by their inward nature. These titanic natures belong especially to the heroic ages of the world, to the period anterior to political civilisation, and therefore Shakespeare also transported thither his most tragic plays; the rest of his tragedies lie almost all in the times of civil wars, when, for the moment at least, social barriers are loosened, and original power and unfettered passion obtain freer play. Amongst the ancients also those are the mightiest tragic characters which have, as it were, outgrown the human standard and provoke the jealousy of the gods. Yet with them the instances are not rare in which the tragic hero does not really overstep the bounds of morality, in which the catastrophe grows out of the intricacies of events and the action is woven like an intrigue of fate, in which great, patriotic, and moral duties struggle in the man with equally legitimate impulses. An action of this kind Shakespeare has only once depicted in Julius Cæsar; they are most fascinating, but as rare in the nature of things as in the group of Shakespeare's plays. The far more usual round of tragic events is, as with him, to be sought for in a man's own breast. The disunion and the conflict between the good and evil nature, the blind impulse of passion and the stubborn strength of the will thus incited by it, these are the powers at work in the tragedies of our poet and in those of real life itself. It was just on this point that tragedy attracted our own Schiller the most: because it depicts this inner struggle of the reason with that sensual part of man by which we alone arrive at a consciousness of our moral nature. In all Shakespeare's tragedies the subject is ever the degenerating of a more or less noble nature under the preponderance of a great passion; the consequences of these excesses bring sorrow on the hero, and in this pathos his better contrary nature rises, too late yet to ward off the ruin, but not too late to atone for the past by a purification of his nature; often, too, so that a spiritual power rises in the tragic character, not in opposition to but in connection with the ruling passion, and by its self-revenging consequence, by a strength of character which bends not before misfortune, inspires us even with esteem for the erring one. In the most various gradations

Shakespeare has carried out this tragic course. In Lear the whole judgment is overwhelmed by intemperate passion; it returns in his affliction, and the nature is purified at the last. The intemperance of weakness works in Richard II., just as in Lear that of strength. Coriolanus' self-recollection is overthrown by his pride; aroused by his noble nature he chooses voluntary suffering, and thus atones for his error by a heroic conquest of his scarcely conquerable nature. In Othello moderation is overlooked in one false step, which revenges itself by fearful results, but in his misfortune the Moor rises full of honour even in his error, and atones for it by his self-punishment. In Brutus the choice lies between duty and duty; sorrow for mistaken aims is, therefore, easily endured by the steadfast nature. Timon's reason, wasted in merry living, is awakened at the outburst of self-created misfortune. In Macbeth the fall of his noble nature is followed by pangs of conscience; his power of defiance then rises, and the violence of his spirit affects us even in its wildness. It is the same with Richard III., whose better nature we must look for in Henry VI., where he performed self-sacrificing deeds for his house. The utterly different characters of King John and Antony are the least tragic ones, because in both the better nature is most feebly aroused. The most remarkable play, however, in a tragic point of view, regarded from this side also, is Hamlet, because the common subject of tragedy, such as we have just pointed out, is here exactly reversed in a manner equally bold and deep; the poet shows that preponderance of the mental powers is as false as that of the sensual. In Hamlet the mind is watchful against the incentives to vengeance and ambition; the sensual physical impulse is represented here as duty, conscience and mind by their union with inactivity are exhibited as error; it is this which gives vent to Hamlet's vein of evil, and carries him, most significantly, rather from suffering into error than from error into suffering; and we feel satisfied when at last passion gains power in him and the mind is utterly relaxed. In all these characters, from Coriolanus down to Richard, there is originally a good disposition; the youthful excess, the striving of passion, inclines them to what is dangerous and demon-like. Aristotle's law of mixed character is fulfilled, although in a wholly different manner. According to Aristotle, the tragic turn of fortune ought not to be the consequence of wickedness, but that of one false step on the part of a man who possesses no great

moral nor civil excellence, who is thriving and respectable, and has more of a noble than a base nature. Shakespeare has never suffered himself to be fettered in this way. He has invested his tragic heroes, when in high positions, often with great moral excellences, and has entangled them often in great crimes. The ancients avoided the representation of great conscious guilt, and wisely, because those mental levers and expedients, necessary to the refinements of crime, were less known; but for us, the aberration of a nature originally noble, the rapid descent from virtue to vice in Shakespeare's plays, has just for this reason an engrossing interest, because his art is equal to the task of fully developing such an inward course. The representation of real crimes is a perilous rock for poetry, because the wholly base and the wholly weak are not capable of an æsthetic charm. But Shakespeare has skilfully avoided this rock also. His base characters are all strong, his weak ones are all never really base. Even where weakness and crime are most closely united, as in Antony, an original power yet shines through, and the extreme art with which Shakespeare keeps within this limit evidences in no small degree the profound instinct of art which qualified this man to be the lawgiver of the new drama.

Comedy with Shakespeare is, in contrast to tragedy, directed against the weaknesses of men; passion, natural affection, instead of degenerating in youthful luxuriancy, become worn out and blighted under the power of self-love and vain imagination. While in the one is depicted the inflexibility of strong natures, which strive even against overwhelming circumstances and powers, in the other, on the contrary, at least in the comedy of intrigue, the circumstances and outward events are sometimes the lever of the whole action, and a poetical charm is sought for in mistakes, recognitions, and improbabilities, instead of in the development of deep characters. This form, the pride of the Spanish stage, is scarcely to be found in Shakespeare. The theme of his comedy, which with him essentially is only a comic representation of character (*Character-Lustspiel*), is the littleness of a narrow nature, poverty of mind and passion, and not rarely, in direct contrast to his tragedy, the preponderance of the erring mental element over the natural passions. The comic epopee and the humorous romance ('Reineke Fuchs,' 'Don Quixote,' and others) are always, when they are most successful, opposed to the one-sided prominence of mind, to everything

fantastic and whimsical; the comedy might scarcely venture so much as these narrative works, since, being a visible representation, it might not deviate so far from the grounds of reality. Nevertheless, Shakespeare's comedy, in its characteristic tendency, is decidedly enough placed as if in the most direct contrast to his tragedy. If selfishness and egotism give the reins to passion, self-love appears, on the other hand, vain and self-sufficient as it is, not so much in crime as in folly, not so much by errors of impulse as of the head, by whims and fancies prejudicial to the healthy nature, by false steps, not of passion, but of reason, not of morality, but of intelligence; the comic challenges our better knowledge, the tragic our better conscience. This skilful contrast is but to be seen in Angelo. In him at first constrained powers of reason had smothered passion, and so far he is rather a comic character, which by an easy turn could be brought to a comic end; as soon as passion prevails over his mind he becomes a tragic character. In Orsino the mind is feeble in imagination, so that no genuine passion can gain ground; so to excess is Malvolio. In Love's Labour's Lost the mind dares to crush nature, in Benedick vanity presumes to resist the female sex, in Falstaff it leads him to consider himself an object of love; in all the caricatures of Shakespeare the vain effort is predominant of making show pass for reality. In conformity with this purport of comedy, the scene must lie, not in heroic warlike times, nor in vast political relations, but in the domestic circle, rather in the present relations of polished and conventional society, where the mutual dependence of men checks the growth of wild passion and refines the affections. The deeper side of life is out of place here, where the laughing exterior and superficial emotions of men are more concerned. Aristotle therefore assigned to tragedy noble men as to rank and character, and to comedy inferior ones; Shakespeare's age demanded princes for tragedy, peasantry for pastoral plays, and the middle *class* of citizens for comedy. These outward distinctions Shakespeare disregarded, but all the characters in his comedies, as we have before pointed out, belong to a middle *stamp*. That they may not prove dull and flat, that this narrower scale of humanity may not become indifferent to us, the poet has carefully employed two effectual expedients. He has contented himself but rarely with the pure sphere of the comic, he has carried his comedy to the very verge of the serious drama (*Schauspiel*), or even of tragedy, and has interspersed it

with circumstances of the most valuable kind. If Goethe, from a many-sided nature, consented reluctantly to the direct course of the tragedy, Shakespeare, from that completeness of nature which shrinks from a one-sided contemplation of life, yielded yet more unwillingly to the one-sided development of any strict form. The other expedient is that he places burlesque figures side by side with the nobler characters of his comedy, by which means they are brought closer to us. Without the introduction of Armado and Malvolio, Orsino and Navarre would commend themselves less to our notice. Those characters are *genre* pictures, but there is in them a high degree of truth, so that they are attractive in the midst of their ugliness, like the comic masks of the ancients. They are, therefore, in nowise without an interest of their own; Shakespeare extracted a fascination even from them. The dull contentment, the self-sufficiency, the self-complacency, of persons inwardly and outwardly poor, who are not even artificially infected with the dangerous aspirations of the higher classes, this is in itself poetical, and acquires in Shakespeare's comedy a still stronger interest by the contrast with the loftier meditations and efforts of their intellectual companions, which in reality lie parallel in internal folly with the exterior of those very caricatures. For whilst the more refined personages err with more conscious mind, and at last stand ashamed, with disappointed expectations, before the ruin of their vain pretensions and fancies, the people of this class, like the clowns in the Midsummer Night's Dream, are raised in the self-satisfaction and assurance of their actions above all disappointment in success, and are therefore insensible to the mischievous joy of others; with them nothing fails, neither their aims nor their humour. Just in this, however, lies the true ground of the comic, and it is for this reason that, in spite of all our present refinement, the comic power of these characters survives all changes of taste; these types of folly and absurdity are completely dyed with the comic colours of nature, indelible for all ages. In the delineation of this world of beings Shakespeare appears in all his amiability. These harmless weaknesses excite his mirth and the child-like humour of his kindly heart. With forbearing mildness he passes by these bubbles of folly; his comedy is rarely a bird of prey, pouncing on the ridiculous and tearing its victim to pieces, but it is here like the lark, which sings in harmless joy in the serene firmament. The cold reason and the cold heart, which

belong to sarcasm and satire, are utterly wanting in Shakespeare. Only when absurdity becomes dangerous does his merry humour find its limit. When he considers the manifold imperfections of the age, the obnoxious immoralities of the multitude, the laxity of court manners, the unnatural fashions and dress, the Puritanical wolf in sheep's clothing, he lays aside his tolerant many-sidedness, and cuts deeply to remove the corrupt evil from the body of the age. This predominant mildness was the fruit of his healthy nature, which never suffered itself to become embittered by the evils of the world. If it has been complained that Shakespeare's art lacked that inward cheerfulness which can free the mind from the burden of reality, the ground for this complaint lies essentially in the form of the tragedy, which by the weak in general is not endured. No one would accuse his comedies of a want of cheerfulness. They possess it to such an extent that even the pedants of the former century over-estimated them on account of it. Johnson considered that Shakespeare had a predilection for comedy; that in tragedy he often wrote with much trouble and little success, but that in comedy he seemed to write without labour that which no labour could improve. He considered that in tragedy he was always 'struggling after some occasion to be comic, but that in comedy he seemed to repose, to luxuriate, as in a mode of thinking congenial to his nature;' that tragedy with him seemed to be skill, but comedy instinct. This is in nowise so. Much rather do his comedies give by far the most imperfect idea of Shakespeare's poetic, aye, even perhaps of his comic power, for some of the comic characters in his tragedies throw such light on events by their brilliant and deep wit that they far surpass the figures in his comedies. But then Shakespeare much more rarely indeed seeks occasion in his tragedies to descend to comedy, than he does in comedy to rise to the seriousness of tragedy. And in general no one would wish to exchange the shallowness of his comedies with the depth of his tragedies. Moreover, in these different views there lies only an evidence of the poet's versatile ability for all things. He has equal sympathy with jest and earnest, he hates with his Rosalind those who are in extremity of either laughing or melancholy, he has a tear of feeling for the dark, and the gladdest laugh for the bright side of the world, and he controls with equal power our emotions of joy and sorrow.

If from the forms of character which are peculiar to the

drama (*Schauspiel*), to the comedy, and to the tragedy, we gain an essential step in arriving at Shakespeare's opinion with respect to the course of human action, we shall still approach nearer to this by considering the issue of the plays, or the administration of the so-called *poetic*, but much rather *moral justice*. The comedy affords us less insight into this, on account indeed of the lesser importance of its contents. Yet even here the natural law is strictly adhered to, that as in tragedy the moral, so here the rational, shall triumph in the issue, not folly in the one and vice in the other; the issue of an unaccountable folly may be harmless; with regard to the accountable and obnoxious it will always prove confounding; the catastrophe passes not from happiness to misfortune, but from vanity to disappointment; the judgment receives satisfaction by the adjusting of the perverted. If in the tragedy fear and sympathetic pity hold us in suspense, in the comedy, on the contrary, we are swayed alternately by the hope of the return of the actors from their erring ways, and by sympathetic joy at the appearance of this return. This joy we should certainly truly feel with the characters which attract our interest, for example, with Orsino and Benedick, but in the deceit of mischievous folly it turns to the side of those who would have been deceived. Thus as in comedy the demands of the understanding are satisfied, so in tragedy are those of moral justice. From the chronicles of history Shakespeare conveyed into his poetry the idea and image of a just-ruling Nemesis, so familiar in his age; Bacon, who only at times saw this Nemesis prominently distinguished in history, demanded straightway of poetry that she should in this take the place of history, that in her kingdom the images of things should conform themselves to the will of the mind, and not, as in reality, that the mind should accommodate itself to the things. And no demand is more just than this. For if the encroachments of passion are glorified in poetry, if unmerited sufferings remain unexpiated, if the moral comes not forth victorious out of the ruin of vice, and the face of eternal justice remains veiled, then the work of art excites only pain and vexation instead of satisfaction, whether it be a Klinger, who with his rude bizarrerie theoretically as well as practically fights for the triumph of crime, or a Schiller, who in a strange blunder assigns the lot of annihilation to the beautiful on earth. How far removed was Shakespeare from the bewildered nature

of so many of our contemporaries, who, in this annihilation of the beautiful reflect their own deformity! Not indeed that with a pedantic distribution of an accurately definite justice he degraded virtue and vice to a calculation of loss and gain; if poetic justice is thus to be understood, that for a fixed crime a fixed punishment is assigned, and for this or that virtue a reward, then we have ourselves shown that Shakespeare administered it not. Only with him throughout do the fates of his characters exactly accord with their nature and their actions. Bacon was struck by the wonderful instances in experience in which God's justice is even here made manifest; whoever has the opportunity of looking at once into the inner and outer life of men will indeed not unfrequently detect the track of this Nemesis; this exceptional appearance in the actual world is the rule in Shakespeare's poetical one. It is not the stars which with him determine the fate of men, but their works; justice lies throughout just at the point where it is most fruitful for the poetic representation; that the cause of the descending fate is prepared by the man himself, that the end lies in the beginning, that the cup mixed by himself is placed at the lips of the evil-doer, and even here retribution happens for that which is here done. Scarcely ever does the poet, as is the case with our great German dramatists, hold out fair hopes of justice to come; at the most only in his subordinate figures; with the main characters throughout their own nature proves even here their own judgment. In certain mysterious instances Shakespeare has not deprived us of that consolation of religion; in Cymbeline most expressly the inexplicable severity of Providence is shown to be protecting love; we are reconciled with the lot of the innocent victims in some of his tragedies by faith in a future compensation; but wherever the poet had to develop a complete life, we shall find he has himself administered complete justice. Rightly to understand this, we must try to apprehend throughout his vast mind, which was so far from narrow pedantry. Often has he taken punishment for granted and left it unnoticed, often has he placed it far below the surface, but the reader who once knows him will not misunderstand this. That bastard John, in Much Ado about Nothing, escapes by flight; the fate of Aufidius and Volumnia is left in obscurity; but who could err in the explanation of this? No sudden punishment meets Henry IV. for his usurpation; but it agrees well with the nature of this character that the Nemesis

strikes him not with the sword, but makes him empty by degrees the cup of sickness and remorse. Yet this would not be the complaint against Shakespeare, that he inflicts too little and too gentle punishment, but that it is too hard and too equal. It is not alone criminals who go to ruin with him, but those also who committed only pardonable faults, and others whose whole offence was that they came into dangerous collision with dangerous natures. Shakespeare has certainly taken the liberty on some few occasions of practising an injustice, though only in the case of subordinate characters, which may tend to the exercise of a justice all the more severe on the principal characters. He has besides permitted Banquo, Duncan, Hastings, and Cordelia to perish, only for the sake of the error of imprudence. Yet from Shakespeare's moral system, tending as it does to an active use of life, that lesson would result which Bacon enforced with so much emphasis, that men must expand their thoughts and look circumspectly around them if they would truly advance their happiness, that, as it says in Troilus,

> omission to do what is necessary,
> Seals a commission to a blank of danger.

But then this unhappy nature, this indolent imprudence, meet in Shakespeare with misfortune certainly, but not with punishment; honour may be closely allied with misfortune; and this procedure of the poet expresses stronger than everything his aversion of the theory which places happiness as the aim of life. Death befalls those careless ones; but if the basest criminal meets in Shakespeare with nothing worse, must not this be an unjust awarding of the issue? But then death is to the poet just the means to a determined end; we must not look at *what* the issue is, but *how* it is, and what the circumstances are which accompany it. As in Shakespeare actions would be measured according to circumstances, so their end is in proportion to the strivings of the actors, and to the inner consciousness of the error. Here lies the plain secret of Shakespeare's poetical justice. Death indeed in Lear befalls the multitude without distinction, but Cordelia dies in the glory of a blessed deliverer, Lear in expiation, Glo'ster smiling, Kent with joy, the others lie caught in their own snares, robbed of their aims, the worldly souls forfeiting the world, which was

all to them. How differently does Macbeth fall by the hand of a hero whom he had always feared, and Richard by the snares of a sycophant whom he had always despised! It does not then depend on the very letter of the issue, but on the manner in which the issue is endured, whether men meet death cursed or blessed, thwarted in their base aims or attaining lofty ones, with noble consciousness or with stinging conscience, in heavenly sereneness or in hellish despair. Thus regarded, the tragic issues follow not one line, but graduate from Richard to Cordelia in the richest diversity. And the sublime moral lesson which lies in the exercise of this justice is this—that death is in itself no evil, that life is in itself no blessing, that outward prosperity is no happiness, but that inner consciousness alone; that the greatest reward of virtue is virtue itself, and the greatest punishment of vice is vice itself. Therefore the truly noble, such as Posthumus and Imogen, reap no outward happiness as a reward at last; it is rather taken from them; and Henry V. yields his honours from himself to God; all their reward is the voice within, and the self-consciousness of having maintained the dignity of man.

If now, provided with this clue, which we have drawn from the nature of the dramatic forms and of Shakespeare's moral justice, we inquire finally respecting that which Johnson and Pope designated his moral system, we would premise that in doing so a proper and complete system of ethics must be out of the question. We only bring prominently forward a few great and highly simple points of view, which obtrude themselves in the actions represented just as often as in express precepts in his works, as the poet's fundamental opinion concerning the things of life. Upon these perhaps a complete system of morals might be constructed, but our intention has nowhere been to spin out the threads to the vast extent that the material in Shakespeare's works would permit, for this would be an endless task. We desire to impute nothing to the poet which does not seem to ourselves to lie in him; not that we have imagined that he has actually considered every smallest thought which we have sought to consider after him, only that we hope he would acknowledge, if he lived, that he might have thought the thoughts which we have appended here and there

to his own, according to the characteristics of his mind and to the design of his works. And so we are satisfied in this subject also to set forth those *characteristics of his moral views* which seem to us indisputably his property, and that too of his consciousness.

Pope has strikingly designated Shakespeare's moral system as one of an entirely worldly character, which the poet places in opposition to the notions obtained from revelation, and which he considers sufficient to take the place of these. He felt that he does not exempt men from the fear of the consequences of immorality, but that he insists upon this strongly; and that, whilst he sets aside religious considerations, he has extolled the love of humanity more than any other writer. This is so just that even a Birch must acknowledge it. The unhesitating security with which Shakespeare took this purely human course is, in the age in which he lived, most admirable. His poetic contemporaries around him lapsed into free-thinking, and at last in devout repentance laid aside their art with their morals; on the other side the zealots raged against the stage; through all this *he* passed unbiassed, boldly turning his back against the enemies to enlightened progress, wholly untouched by the breath of senseless frivolity. Many grounds may be found for Shakespeare's conduct in not only not seeking a reference to religion in his works, but in systematically avoiding it even when opportunity offered. Like Bacon he would fain avoid every stumbling-stone; he considered the stage moreover as no substitute for the pulpit; had he done so, the clergy of that day and of the present would have blamed him still more harshly, though now they rage against him that he did not do so. Much more deeply, however, may another impression in this respect have decidedly influenced his mind. Shortly before Shakespeare's time England had gone through those fearful persecutions of Catholics and Protestants, those executions for the sake of the faith, the destruction and purification of opinions; all round him the enmity of a sectarian spirit prevailed; he saw the ascetic moroseness of the Puritans and their fanaticism on the increase, and he said, as if in prophecy (Timon, Act III. sc. 3), that they bore their 'virtuous copies to be wicked, like those that, under hot ardent zeal, would set whole realms on fire.' This state of things alienated all men from the ascetic exaggerations of religion, and urged others into scepticism; the same experiences which *after* the English Reformation made Cher-

burg a free-thinker urged Bacon and Raleigh also at this time to deistical, or, as the zealots say, to atheistical views. And thus Shakespeare, startled by these same experiences, liked best, when he needed moral advice, to dive into the revelation which God has written in the human heart. All, therefore, which religion enjoins as to faith and opinion he wholly discarded from his works, as he had only to do with action; but in action the religious and divine in man is nothing else than the moral. In the sense in which Schiller praises Christianity, that it sets aside rigid law and places free inclination in its stead, Shakespeare's moral system is a Christian one. It is not so in the strict sense in which it is written that unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other, but it is so in that in which, making allowance for the changing circumstances of life, the Gospel teaches—'Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves;' and the Apostle—'He that giveth in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth not in marriage doeth better.' Shakespeare's ethics are essentially human, and he can in this respect be placed on a level with the ancients, whom we read with humanistic aims. If Bacon thought truly that man can draw some notions of good and evil from the 'light of nature,' from the law of conscience, which is a sure spark and remnant of the original purity of man, Shakespeare would, as Pope justly said, have held these notions as sufficient to regulate us honourably in this life.[1] This 'deity in our bosom' Shakespeare has bestowed with intentional distinctness even upon his most abandoned villains, and that too when they deny it; to nourish this spark and not to quench it is the loud sermon of all his works.

Shakespeare's moral view starts from the simple point that man is born with powers of activity which he is to use, and with powers of self-determination and self-government which are to guide aright this use of the powers of action. *Whence* we are and *whither* we go, these are the questions which the poet, as well as the historian, yields to philosophy and religion.

[1] Sofort nun wende dich nach innen,
Das Centrum findest du da drinnen,
Woran kein Edler zweifeln mag.
Wirst keine Regel da vermissen,
Denn das selbständige Gewissen
Ist Sonne deinem Sittentag.
Goethe.

'Men must *endure* their going hence even as their coming hither; ripeness is all.' 'Why am I? make that demand to the Creator; it suffices me thou art.' These two sentences accurately designate this point of view. In this *whence* and *whither* the man is passive, but in the course of life he is active; and here lies his tangible vocation, without having satisfied which he cannot be matured for a higher degree of existence. Shakespeare reflected upon the powers at work in nature and mankind, and saw clearly the aim of the immense motion lying in the motion itself. This led him to those maxims he so much enforced: that nature only lends man his talents and gives them not, only bestows them in order that he may use them and render them back again. In his moral system, therefore, everything bears upon the incentive to activity; life appeared to him too short to waste it in speculations and inaction; in Hamlet especially this lesson is taught with the severest emphasis. The most versatile endowments are in this man a useless disordered mass because the electric spark of energy is not struck into them, because with careful deliberation and overstrained sensibility he has smothered the instinct of active power, that first-born of human gifts; the speculative inquirer, who makes the thought and not the act the measure of things, becomes thus at variance with the guiding stars of nature, with conscience and reason itself; they suffer from excess of use, as his power of action does from the defect of it; in the verdict upon his actions, to which these inner powers are called, conscience and reason err with him in the examination and trial of his case, and a false judgment checks and misleads his will; the most impressive warning which Shakespeare could cast against the sophistry of the sceptic, that by freshness of action he might bring him back to soundness of mind. Just in the same sense does the poet in his comedies also call us away from ascetic mortifications, from vain studies, from all the quietism of contemplation, from the empty pastime of puns and wit; in Richard II. from the propensity to idleness and play, in Timon from idle luxury and idle charity, from all this he calls us back to action, since it becomes the gods alone to be mere spectators in this life; above all he punishes in Antony the sinful waste of great and distinguished powers. In all the four plays which we have here especially denoted the poet has in the same sense and manner most expressly laid down his opinion as to the superiority of the active nature. These energetic men, Fortinbras, Boling-

broke, Alcibiades, and Octavius, are here given parts contrasting with those of the different inactive characters; it is not that their characters gain for them all their happiness and success, perchance through a great superiority of nature, but in spite of their inferior talents, their energy in itself stands out above the inactivity of the others, no matter how beautiful the source out of which this passiveness flows, nor how base that from which this activity proceeds. Thus Heaven assists not the pious but indolent Richard II., in spite of his religious trust, but it helps the pious Helena, who helps herself. In the same spirit the excess of love, with all its sweetness, is despised when it draws the man away from his strength, because 'he wears his honour in a box unseen, that spends his manly marrow' in the arms of love.

And just so, because work is not a curse, but a blessing, the poet's feeling goes against the tranquillity of the idyl; the sons of Cymbeline, who live in the most charming innocence, question with a true human instinct whether repose is the best life. Far rather is Shakespeare on the contrary an eloquent commender of want and hardness, which he esteems as the 'mother of hardiness,' the test of the soul, and out of which he would have us draw the spirit of good. Therefore he held nothing more unmanly than to despond in misfortune and to leave the helm amid storm and broken masts. Therefore in war lay the delights of his strong nature; genuine ambition is no sin in Henry V., proud war makes 'ambition virtue;' the danger of resting in idleness renders war desirable in exchange for peace, whose wealth and peace induce 'the imposthume that inward breaks,' bringing evil and death to the age. Warlike valour is, therefore, extolled even in its exaggeration in Coriolanus, even in its criminality in Macbeth, even in its union with usurpation in John, still more when coupled with heroic calmness in Othello, with patriotic love in Faulconbridge, with that high idea of honour in Percy, with moderation and confidence in God in Henry V. Manly honour and valour are with Shakespeare one and the same idea: energy especially he regarded, like the ancients, as the manly virtue (virtus). For this reason, therefore, Shakespeare has nowhere dealt with the subjects so familiar in German poetry; he has scorned to bring sentimentality and sensibility into a system or into attractive representation, to depict the isolated life of mind and heart, the images of feigned and artificial sentiments, the shrivelled forms of private and hothouse life, unless it

be as caricatures, which pass by the noblest aims of existence. Throughout he points rather at the great stage of life, and values action for mankind in general beyond contemplation, the principle of Alexander before that of Diogenes, because it tends to larger ideas. The opinion of the active Englishman surpasses in this respect (and Bacon also is in this of one mind with Shakespeare) the opinion even of Aristotle, the man of active antiquity, who conceded the highest rank to contemplative rather than to active life. The great world-life of history possessed not for Shakespeare too much restlessness and hostile commotion for it to drive him, as it did Goethe, to escape it in science and nature; he had interest enough in it not to grow weary in its contemplation, power enough to raise himself above its evils, perception enough to hear the harmony in its discords. Finally, moreover, from this opinion of Shakespeare's as to man's vocation to active life springs his aversion to those systems of happiness which is excellently expressed, not strictly in the words, but in the whole spirit of Timon. For all these doctrines of the ancients respecting the highest good aim at personal good and not at the common good, to which Bacon as well as Shakespeare directed man as to the only worthy aim of his activity. The hermit, who separates himself wholly from the things of the world, would have been called happy by Shakespeare as little as by Aristotle and Bacon, nor according to this highest conception of man would he even have been called a man.

If the first impression which Shakespeare drew from the contemplation of active life was the conviction of our obligation to use our inherent power of action, the second was, as we have pointed out, the perception of the necessity that this power should be guided aright by reason and conscience. It is certainly not without design that Shakespeare has placed in the lips of just the most detestable of his characters, Iago and Edmund, strikingly distinct precepts, namely, that it lies in our own free will that we are thus or thus, and that it is not practicable to impute our base actions to causes lying without us; that fatalistic view, which disputes man's free will, the poet grants to the sceptic alone, who is exactly at variance with those true guides. The sayings of Iago, according to whom reason is given us to keep passion and sensuality in check, are quite the same respecting the contrast of mind and desire as

those which occupy the poet personally so frequently in his sonnets and descriptive poems; free self-determination is esteemed by him as the most distinguishing gift of our race; mind and conscience are to be the rulers in the community of our inward being, who are to restrain the storms of passion; even a monster like Richard must acknowledge this power of conscience in bridling the strong and presumptuous, and even the aerial spirit Ariel is capable of mastering the fleeting inclination by the power of the will. This may sound trivial, but the simple is always the true. Schiller, who, endowed with just as much philosophical and poetic spirit as moral character, pondered on the problem of human being, reached no other point than this—that as all mankind waver to and fro between nature and cultivation, in individual men the struggle between freedom and natural impulse and the striving after the due balance of these is the highest thing that affects us. In this sense, we have seen, the struggles and collisions of the dramatic actions in Shakespeare are all designed, in this spirit his greater or lesser sympathies with this or that form of character are expressed. He is attracted by the fine nature of the womanly soul in which morality is innate, and in which those antagonistic powers are peacefully united. In men, he has rarely or not at all depicted this instinctive virtue, the kindly nature in which goodness springs rather from simplicity. For most of all he liked even in women, but above all in men, that purity of morals which has passed through struggles and temptations, not the virtue of habit but of principle, not instinctive but tested, the product of the reason and of volition. He would not, like Aristotle and Bacon, have believed virtue inherent in us either *from* nature or *against* nature; inherent in us is alone the capacity for receiving it and for developing it in us by culture or habit. He despised not the school of habit as little as those philosophers did, he knew that custom and use 'almost can change the stamp of nature, and master the devil, or throw him out with wondrous potency.' But higher in value to him was the virtue of principle which sets before itself noble aims in life. For such aims affect the ennobling of the soul, not partially but at once; they do not cultivate in us single virtues, but they make us predisposed for all, they develop in us that feeling of self-reliance and honour which makes Henry and Posthumus inaccessible to all lower temptations. Thus the instinctive virtue of Cymbeline's

sons had also its charm for the poet, but like them Shakespeare strives to rise out of the state of nature that knows no vice, as he does out of the opposite condition of continual evil (a time like Lear's) when the mind has no power over the passions, into that state of culture and reason in which tested and approved virtue raises the man above the sin around him and creates a golden age in his soul. For evil will be only then wholly overcome when it is known and looked at in the face, and evil desires will be conquered only when their syren song has been resisted, for he cannot be a perfect man who has not been 'tried and tutor'd in the world.'

From these maxims upon the active and guiding powers within us the great truth develops itself that if activity and action alone can give strength and fulness to life, moderation alone can add the charm and the lasting fruit. As natural as it was to the old tragedists when they, rooted firmly in the idea of the envy of the gods at the happiness of men, extolled the middle state and a moderate prosperity, so was it natural to Shakespeare, since in his tragedies throughout he has to do with the consequences of overgrown passion, to commend moral moderation and the middle state and disposition of the soul as the happiest which falls to the lot of man. This doctrine thoroughly pervades the works of our poet, and it is of such a kind in him that it makes the difference between a middle course and a half-way course most keenly perceptible throughout, from the confounding of which in the present day we often hear scornful objections raised against the ancient wisdom, which pronounced the middle course to be the best. And it is indeed only too true that in practice the weak man, who is regarded as an example of the middle course, exhibits indifference as the result of an even balance, and a wavering between extremes that of a middle path; but that which Shakespeare teaches is to confirm energy by moderation, and to seek in the middle course no resting-place of inactivity, but the necessary rallying point of the active powers. He sees the good not in the steep ascent, nor in the precipice, but in the even path through life, and this path he shows us with that unhesitating assurance which gives confidence and courage to the soul. He seeks the medium not in suppressing the power which lies in passion, but in restraining it by the yoke of work, not in the weakness of passiveness, but in the sparing of the powers, the use of which is indeed his first law. What he means by in-

decision and a half-way course Shakespeare has shown us in York; what he means by moderation and a middle course he has exhibited in Posthumus, who is strong even to the heroic control of his passionate and excited nature, and in Henry, in whom the middle course is not mediocrity but modesty in greatness. It is just this favourite of our poet, who knows best the wise reflection, which underlies this principle of a moderate habit of life, that when that which is done is not done wisely and circumspectly the power of action is in danger of being itself ruined. For 'violent fires soon burn out themselves,' 'to climb steep hills requires slow pace at first,' therefore this Henry searches carefully for just motives and a safe beginning for his noble exploits, to which indeed a hot ambition spurs him on; according to an expressive image of Bacon's, Argus before the resolution to act, Briareus after it. This is the same man who from this very sense of moderation so wisely took care not to deaden in himself the feeling of cheerfulness, not to refuse to action that 'sweet recreation,' the lack of which induces a sickly swarm of evils, to avoid that universal plodding which

> prisons up
> The nimble spirit in the arteries,
> As motion and long-during action tires
> The sinewy vigour of the traveller.

It is the same man who, naturally passionate, indeed, has become master of his passions, less by nature as Horatio than by merit and power of will, who by the happy 'mixture of the elements' attained to that firmly resting central point of the human being which lies in moderation and the true medium, and which is secure against all the false hovering round extremes.

In this true medium Bacon and Aristotle sought for virtue, and nothing is more consolatory than to see Shakespeare of one mind in this with these great men, above all in these times, when, following in the track of Byron, a wild set of young writers with wild outcry set up this doctrine as their standard—that nothing is nobler in man than passion and desire, which to our poet was the badge of animal nature. This man, who had a hundred-fold more mind and passion to lavish than hundreds of our modern regenerators, has throughout wisely admonished to be sparing with it, that it may be ready for

action; he knew, before the thousand-fold experience of the effervescent minds of the present day taught it, that

> fire that mounts the liquor till't run o'er,
> In seeming to augment it, wastes it.

In numberless passages in his works, therefore, he calls us away from excess, because 'the sweetest honey is loathsome in his own deliciousness,' because he saw surfeiting changed to fasting, too great freedom to restraint, wildness in joy or sorrow destroying itself, rash haste outrunning its aim, exaggerated grief endangering life, and exaggerated jest recoiling on the jester. He showed in Hamlet how hesitating deliberation and fleeting insensibility mislead in action, in Coriolanus how the highest endowments by being overstrained degenerate into contrary ones, in Angelo how suppression of the senses avenges itself, in Antony how suppression of the mind produces the same result, in Romeo how excess of love is blighted, in Timon how excess of hatred becomes powerless. How thoroughly penetrated Shakespeare was with this principle of wise moderation is shown perhaps most strongly in this, that he ventured even to oppose the Christian laws which demand an overstraining of human nature, for he approved not that the limits of duty should be extended beyond the intention of nature. He taught, therefore, the wise and human medium between the Christian and heathen precepts of love and hatred of our enemies. We are 'not to heat a furnace for our foe, so hot that it do singe ourselves;' we are to be satisfied with repentance, because otherwise we are 'nor of Heaven nor earth;' we are to avoid making enemies, but when we have them we should so act that they may shun us; we should be able for our enemies, but rather in 'power than use.' That it is possible to do too much in good things is an express doctrine of Shakespeare's, both by word and example, which follows well upon this his modified doctrine respecting the love of our enemies. Thus excessive liberality ruins Timon, whilst moderate liberality keeps Antonio in honour; the genuine ambition which makes Henry V. great overthrows Percy, in whom it rises too high. Exaggerated virtue brings Angelo to ruin; and when in those near him the excess of punishment proves harmful, and cannot hinder sin, then mercy, the most God-like gift

that man possesses, is also exhibited in its excess as the producer of sin.

With these last propositions that opinion is closely connected which has become very familiar to us from Shakespeare, that in itself nothing is altogether good or evil, that nothing upon earth is so base that it has not its good quality, and nothing so good that it cannot degenerate into abuse. Virtue misemployed, we have seen in Romeo, becomes vice, and vice is at times ennobled by the mode of action. Thus we have seen Jessica innocently violate child-like piety, and Desdemona truth; Isabel practises feigned sin and Lorenzo pious deceptions without scruple; they depart from the straight line of virtue, not because they follow the Jesuitical moral that the aim sanctifies the means, but because the acutest conscience and consciousness, the will to do right and to prevent wrong, directs their actions undoubtedly aright. Thus in Pisanio truth and falsehood alternate, according to the position of things, from the same point of conscience, that although the duty of service lies in his office, the servant is not to do every service but only what is right. Thus even Hamlet's too great conscientiousness is not a crime but a fault, and somewhat of the lack of it in Faulconbridge is not a virtue but a praiseworthy quality, because in the great political world another law prevails than in the domestic, and because the circumstances throughout change the character of the actions. In Shakespeare's opinion (and here also he is one with Bacon and Aristotle) there is no positive law of religion or morals which could form the rule of moral action in precepts ever binding and suitable for all cases; not the *what* alone, but the *how* also, determines the worth of actions; the acting man depends, like the physician and the pilot, upon circumstances, and not merely upon himself and upon stated rules; morality, like politics, is a matter so complicate with relations, conditions of life, and motives, that it is impossible to bring it to final principles, and in the manifold collisions of duties the balancing between man and man, between public and private duty, between case and case, is inevitable.

If, however, Shakespeare pointed out to us a middle line of action between defect and excess, which can so easily be missed, if he left it to ourselves to find our way in the complex circumstances of life, does he deserve to be called so excellent a moral teacher and guide through the world as we have desig-

nated him? We believe that he does deserve it on account of this very procedure. The line of straightforward action is only one among innumerable crooked ones; it is hard to find it in life, as it is hard to define it tangibly in theory. Virtue is a middle course, as Aristotle made perceptible, not with respect to a matter, but with respect to ourselves, not objectively definable as the medium between two numbers, 2 and 10, but only subjectively to be defined as between him who consumes the weight of 2 mina (μνᾶ) and him who consumes that of 10; the just medium is not 6 once for all, because this were too much for a boy and not enough for a Milo. This aim of the middle course in right action is but one, and it is difficult to find; the wrong are numberless and easy. Now to conceal this truth, to represent to us the way through life as easy, and to deceive us respecting our powers as well as our vocation, is not expedient; least of all for the teacher who wishes to lead plastic minds to a conscious virtue based upon principle. Shakespeare, however, speaks only for such an object and to such minds. There are classes whose morality is best provided for by the positive letter of religion and of law; but for such as these Shakespeare's writings are in themselves inaccessible; they are only readable and comprehensible to the cultivated, of whom it can be required that they should appropriate to themselves the healthful measure of life, and that self-reliance in which the guiding and inherent powers of conscience and reason united with the will are, when consciously apprehended, worthy aims of life. But even for the cultivated also Shakespeare's doctrine may not always be without danger. How should it alone escape the possibility but just mentioned, that even from the best we may gather the worst, that in the most fragrant flower, to use the poet's own image, 'poison has residence'? But the condition on which his doctrine is entirely harmless is this, that it should be fully and completely received, and without any expunging and separating. Then it is not alone without danger, but it is also more unmistakable and more infallible, and therefore more worthy of our confidence than any system of morality can be. For to the poet alone is it possible to teach by actions instead of words, by living examples instead of cold doctrine, by the eye instead of the ear, unrelentingly to exhibit the consequences of actions, concisely and distinctly to place before us the immeasurable sphere of vast experience, to open to us those immense volumes of fate, as Goethe extols in Shakespeare, and

thus to work on mind and soul with a power, and to sharpen reason and conscience in a manner, which far surpasses the ability of the religious orator and the philosophical writer.

By one great example that can stand for all we would endeavour to make clear how necessary it is to conceive Shakespeare's moral system and his moral being as a whole, if we would not light entirely upon a false track, and how easy it is to select a part from him in which we deviate into direct contrast from the intention, aim, and nature of the great master. The doctrine that nothing is good in and for itself, that there is no rule in which we do not meet with exceptions, misleads most easily to that bold leap of the free-thinker to make exception the rule, which is essentially the great history of the mental and political revolutions of the present day. This possible perversion of the Shakespearian doctrine is besides considerably assisted by the decidedly hostile bearing of the poet towards all conventionalities; this bias against all that is arbitrary and injudicious in the customs of the age is interpreted very easily into a bias against all existing forms. Whoever struggles like Shakespeare against all prejudices of blood and position, who sets aside, as he did, all political rules of faith, opposes the accumulation of honours upon undeserving heads, personally overleaps the barriers of unequal rank, disclaims religious fanaticism, and states unscrupulously his opinions, at that time highly heretical, respecting suicide, duelling, and the honourable interment of the suicide, whoever like him makes the proudest aristocrat (Coriolanus) declaim against customs and the heap of mountainous errors —whoever, we say, thus holds open the breach of progress as Shakespeare has done, we might readily fear respecting him that he would give a helping hand to the idealists and dreamers of the present day, who, appealing to his example, strive to make even the impossible possible, to overthrow the heights of truth by mountains of error, to destroy the charming variety of the world by a universal equalisation, and with religious and political prejudice to strike out Church and State from the ideas of humanf kind.

But, indeed, how totally different is the picture of the poet, if, instead of setting forth one side in this distorted manner, we consider him in his entire nature! Fatal as that doctrine that in itself nothing is either good or bad may be in the hands of the fanatic, who knows not and wishes not to know the world, but

strives to give form to his self-created phantoms, with Shakespeare it is perfectly harmless, because he not only knows the world, but his healthful heart is unembittered by its evils, and because he desired not to have it better than men can make both it and themselves. In him the imagination of the poet is ever linked with the sober judgment of the man of the world, the labour of experience with the freshness of the soul, the reason of age with the youth of the heart; these unhappily in the prime of German poetry were irreconcilable contrasts, but not so in Shakespeare. The autonomy and egotism of individual self would have been an abhorrence to him, while it opposes with strong will all law in politics and morals, and disregards the bonds of religion and state which have kept society together for centuries. For in his opinion the practical wisdom of man would have no higher aim than to carry into society the utmost possible nature and freedom, but for that very reason that he might maintain sacredly and inviolably the natural laws of society, respect existing forms, yet at the same time penetrate into their rational substance with sound criticism, not forgetting nature in civilisation, nor, equally, civilisation in nature.

How impartially unbiassed, how free from *every* prejudice, does Shakespeare therefore appear, in spite of his anti-conventional tendency, in spite of his noble freedom and independence in all questions of that political, social, and religious life which is most exposed to the storm of revolutionary minds and morals! That Shakespeare thought freely and clearly upon religious things an attentive reader can never doubt from his writings; it is a quality which raises him far above the narrow-mindedness in religious matters so peculiar to many in the present day. He was a man of much too clear a mind, in an age which had not outgrown coarse superstition, to do homage even to the more refined. Prophecies are with him under the law of nature, and miracles below the line of reason, even in the lips of his priests. He trifles so wantonly with hell and the devil that it offends even the divines of the present day, who regard Lancelot's hit at the Christian propaganda and the profane allusions in general as striking proofs of Shakespeare's heathenism. It is strange that it is his Friar Laurence who administers the sweet milk of philosophy and not that of religion, and that his anchorites are all practical worldly people. It may strike us that his pious Richard and Henry VI. are very weak people and

unrefreshing characters. It is the despair of the pious among Shakespeare's admirers that he sends all his villains to the grave without contrition, and his noble characters without religious edification, that the requiem over Imogen speak of the evils of this world and not of the glory of that to come, that the friar-duke comforts Claudio with the nothingness of this life and not with the promise of the future, that his loving couples go to the grave without the prospect of meeting again—except precisely Antony and Cleopatra, heathens and voluptuaries! Should we not rightly conclude from these traits that Shakespeare was as much without religion as others of his dramatic contemporaries? But Shakespeare was indeed much too much of a poet to undervalue religious belief; he was, it must be admitted, on the other side much too free-thinking to display any one fixed form of religious views in his poems, otherwise than as a single side in man or a characteristic attribute. He appears also here in that wonderful medium between narrow-mindedness and extreme. He was no fanatic and no infidel, no atheist and no mystic, no Brownist and no politician, he was as much attracted by a good Roman Catholic as by an honest Lutheran; he delineated heathens, free-thinkers, rationalists, and pietists, Brutus, Faulconbridge, Percy, and Katharine, all with equal delight, if only they were worthy characters. In contrast to the above-mentioned traits is a similar series of utterly opposite ones, which exhibit the poet to us always in the same impartiality so conspicuous in him throughout. If he allows Biblical passages to be harmlessly perverted in the lips of his clowns, it was at any rate better than the gloomy use which the Puritans made of them, a frightful picture of which he holds before us in Richard III., who clothes his villainy with mangled passages from Scripture. If he harshly treats the servants of religion who with their practices and devices make worldly things their gods, he has still placed others like Carlisle in a great and illustrious light. If he contemns piety which makes a man weak and dull for the world, he has, however, exhibited in the most brilliant colours that faith and confidence in God which produces strong deeds in Siward, Posthumus, and Henry V. If he permits bad and good to die in passion without remembrance of religion, yet the pious Katharine and the repentant Wolsey die not without their consolations. 'Readiness and ripeness is everything' with the noble Hamlet and Edgar; the words tell us that Shakespeare too

surrendered his conviction before the great riddle of the future, and from the belief in immortality drew the soundest conclusion—that all hinges upon a right use of this life.

And just as here in religious things Shakespeare thought according to the human principle that true freedom is neither to encroach upon one's own, nor still less upon the freedom of others, just as, magnanimous and many-sided, he honoured every genuine conviction, even though it were not his own, and held strongly to one ruling creed, even if he apprehended not all its articles, so he acted also in politics. His ground with regard to the state was as human as that with regard to religion. He would not that the freedom of man in the moral kingdom where he is his own ruler should be endangered by the state. In the conflict of political and moral duties he has left undecided in Brutus, Faulconbridge, and Salisbury to which *he* would give the preference, that is, he has even there taken the men themselves as the deciding point according to their nature, and has only desired that if Brutus should decide politically he should also act politically, and if Salisbury should determine morally that he should also not immorally consent to treachery and alliance with the enemies of the land. In Pisanio and Hubert, however, he has shown that in the service of lords and princes the service of God before everything should not be forgotten. But however high Shakespeare might have estimated the free right of the individual, he would never have fallen into the vain cosmopolitism of the German poets of the former century, much less into the Utopian ideas of the world republic, which would seek to rise above the conditions of space, and which even in those days were not indeed wholly unknown. But working for the general good was to him so dear that with this aim he would have us regard death and honour with equal courage; in the soul and substance of the state there was for him a deep mystery worthy of consideration, and its operation seemed to him 'more divine than breath or pen can give expressure to;' he was in this quite a son of his people, because nothing ranked higher with him than his country and its power and honour. How the joy of patriotism shines forth in his playfulness respecting the French foe, in his representation of the popular heroes, the Bastard, Talbot, and Percy, in his Protestant self-reliance against the Papacy, in his statesmanlike glance upon the position of the sea-walled island, and in the element in which its greatness lay! And yet how far-seeing,

on the other hand, does his historical instinct appear, when we see him grasping and understanding the nature of the times and people, far enough removed from wishing to mould all circumstances into one political form! In what impartiality does he appear in the Roman plays with regard to the democratic, the aristocratic, the monarchical nature both in the state and in men! Coleridge has before remarked that whilst among Shakespeare's contemporaries Massinger showed republican tendencies, and Beaumont and Fletcher exaggerated the principle of divine right, Shakespeare has nowhere testified his adherence to any fixed political party. He evidences in the Roman plays that he esteems and appreciates all existing political forms, but was not insensible to the deterioration of all. In these plays Shakespeare expressed so natural and at the same time so judicious a sense of political freedom, based entirely on historical experience such as belonged not to those times throughout, and in all ages will most rarely be met with. Hume considered that political freedom was never the question with Shakespeare. It certainly was not in the style of modern political cant. But to write a piece so imbued with democratical principles as Julius Cæsar, to place in the mouth of the tyrant Henry VIII. lessons against all undue exercise of power, to question in Richard II. the right of inviolability, this indeed, at a time when James I. called kings earthly gods, was to speak of political freedom. Whoever has any knowledge of English history, whoever knows what feeling agitated the minds of the people when James II. was dethroned, what different moods divided the national leaders, what sentiments among the loyal Tories strove with the judgment that a change of sovereign was necessary, what views among the free-minded Whigs decided them without scruple to take resolute measures—whoever is acquainted with this will perceive in reading the history-plays of Richard II. and King John that with wonderful richness and depth all is here prefigured which in such crises of honour, humanity, and patriotism swayed the English nation on both sides. This is of more value than the language of empty revolutionary boasting, with which the poets of modern times alone recognise the stamp of candour; this could not nor would not have been spoken by Shakespeare, who had so forcibly represented the fearful tragedy of the York and Lancastrian struggles. We must read in Richard II. with what earnestness he insists upon the sacredness of property, and in Troilus and Othello with

what rigour he maintains the strict observance of family, in order that we may understand how infinite is the gap which separates Shakespeare from the political free-thinkers of the present day, when in the most civilised lands we are obliged to defend with all the weapons of reason and political power the right of family and property, which even savages protect in their communities. Shakespeare has, indeed, sympathy with the lower classes who are poor and destitute, and he makes the mighty of the earth, who have forgotten poverty, remember it in their own adversity, but whither the equalisation and prosperity of communism would lead he has made most plain in Cade's revolution. No man has fought more strongly against rank and class prejudice than Shakespeare, but how could his liberal principles have been pleased with the doctrines of those who would have done away with the prejudices of the rich and cultivated only to replace them with the interests and prejudices of the poor and uncultivated. How would this man, who allures so eloquently to the course of honour, have approved if in annulling rank, degrees of merit, and distinction, we extinguish every impulse to greatness, and by the removal of all degrees 'shake the ladder to all high designs'? If indeed no surreptitious honour and false power were longer to oppress mankind, how would the poet have acknowledged the most fearful force of all, the power of barbarity? In consequence of these modern doctrines of equality he would have apprehended that everything would resolve itself into power:—

> Power into will, will into appetite;
> And appetite, an universal wolf,
> So doubly seconded with will and power,
> Must make perforce an universal prey,
> And, last, eat up himself.

Or if this were not the final lot which awaited mankind from these aspirations after equality, if love between nations and endless peace were not that 'nothing' of impossibility, as Alonso expresses it in the Tempest, but could be an actual fruit of these efforts after equality, then the poet would have believed with this time the old age and decrepitude of the world to have arrived, in which it were worthless to the active to live.

Thus conservative is this free-minded poet in religious and political things. If we look upon his personal and moral character, if we pass from his doctrines and characteristics to his own

nature and example, we find still wider the interval which separates him from all the frivolity, the false prejudice, the hollow mediocrity, the vain love of originality, the exciting discontent, which are the marks of the free-thinking of the present day, marks of so many who are Shakespeare's most jealous admirers, although he is not their pattern, but their doom. If we would sum up this character, the simplest means in this case would be that specified above, to extract the sentiments of his writings, and to fix our minds upon those among them which recur most frequently, and so to conclude from these what occupied him most deeply. Whoever will do this will find to his surprise that the relative majority of these passages expresses quite the same character as that at which we arrived from the comparison with Henry V. at the close of the first volume; from the consideration of the whole of his works and their universal impression, and from the enumeration of these single passages, the same result appears, and the one procedure is a proof of the other. By far the purest and most beautiful of his wise sayings are grouped into two concurring series which positively and negatively express one radical essence: on the one side they are directed against all the varieties of conventional life, against all empty show and hollow ostentation, the insipid and superficial use of life; on the other they urge after the essence of things, after simple plainness, after truth and humility. On the one side his stinging wit is pointed against light-minded youth, whose judgments are mere fathers of their garments, and whose constancies expire before their fashions; against the favourites of the drossy age, the sweet gentlemen of the court, who regard keeping their word as *mauvais ton*, and whose accomplishments lie in hand-kissing and 'picking one's teeth;' against the coxcombs who smell like an apothecary's shop; against all the perversity which conceals the truth of nature with false hair and rouge; against the rogues and time-servers who 'turn their halcyon-beaks with every gale;' against the whole age, to whom 'a sentence is but a cheveril-glove;' against the self-conceited whose voice sounds to themselves like supernatural music; against the gibing spirit, whose 'influence is begot of that loose grace which shallow laughing hearers give to fools;' and just as much against the silent oracles, who by empty silence hope to gain the reputation of wisdom; against the *blasé* feelings which arise from wasted understanding and morals; against

the love of originality in the whimsical and the bullying; against the diplomatists, who 'unloose the gordian knot of policy, familiar as their garter,' and against the politicians who could 'circumvent God.' From the store of passages of this character, the tone of which alternates from the merriest humour to the bitterest sarcasm, this one point makes the fullest impression upon us, that this was not a man who cared for the glitter and variety of the world. The opposite sayings, which recall from all that is name, outward show, and ornament to substance, reality, and truth, form the most serious and sublime contrast to these sallies. From those shallow sons of age, the youths of fashion, his eye turns with delight to the bastards of the age, those hearty fellows of rough exterior, those uncut diamonds like Faulconbridge; and from the sweet gentlemen who rhyme themselves into ladies' favours he passes gladly to the healthy, unsusceptible youths like Orlando and Sebastian. In contrast to those court natures, with whom good faith is a mockery, how he stickles for neglected truth, how strikingly he sees in truth the only weapon with which to scorn the devil, how serious and strong is his language and expression, when from all ambiguity and deceit he calls us back to plain truth and simple faith, which knows nothing of artifice, when he warns us above all and before all to be true to ourselves, because it follows from this that we cannot be false to another! How warmly he speaks against 'the seeming truth which cunning times put on to entrap the wisest'! How forcibly and frequently he teaches not to measure things by a glittering appearance, but by their inner worth! To him it is

> The fool-multitude, that choose by show,
> Not learning more than the fond eye doth teach,
> . . . . . but like the martlet
> Builds in the weather on the outward wall
> Even—the force and road of casualty.

And he, therefore, is in his sight not a man of judgment who sets value upon the applause of the multitude. In his aversion to all show and falsity lies the foundation also of his zeal against all hollow ostentation and self-elevation, against pride, which is its own trumpet, against the vain, who praise themselves otherwise than in the deed, and thus 'devour the deed in the praise.' He holds rather in esteem those honourable ones who, for the sake of a good deed, shrink not from the show of evil; with self-denial such as this he has invested his most

pious women, Isabella and Helena. He delighted in unostentatious virtue and extreme humility joined to the most splendid endowments; the resignation which renounces a merited reward, the self-consciousness which needs not outward acknowledgment, these seemed to him amid all human virtues to deserve the highest praise, or more justly to create the highest self-contentment; this doing and acting for the sake of itself, without regard to reward and commendation, was to him the great contrast to the insipid conduct of the world, which rests on vanity, show, and folly. And with this feeling he was equally far from forfeiting his principles, and falling into the extreme of Coriolanus; in depicting this man's love of truth and contempt of applause and reward he has too strikingly cast into the shade the pride and self-exaltation of merit to allow us to think that his own self-reliance could have risen to this exaggerated height. Much more is the impression forced upon us in all his maxims and representations that the poet in his personality himself possessed that modesty which he taught, that his was that golden soul of the full-fraught man of plain and uncoined constancy, to which in the lips of his Henry he always gave the pre-eminence, that in him a love of truth predominated which surpassed every other quality.

Must not this quality in the poet of simple true nature rise yet infinitely in value if we consider at the same time his boundless many-sidedness, in which he seems apparently diverted by everything, the victim of every impression? But these apparently opposite sides hinge exactly one upon the other; his many-sidedness depends essentially on his impartiality, and his impartiality concurs essentially with his sense of truth. Never has a man stood so equally open to the most different sides of life, never has anyone suffered subjects of every kind to affect him with such equal force, nor received from them such unbiassed, genuine, and true impressions, that he might do justice to everything. And just this is the quality which every scholar in his sphere, whatever may be his qualification, *may* learn from this master, and which he *must* learn from him if he will do honour to the teacher, and not carry away fruit from the school, the seed of which has indeed not been sown there. Learn the spirit of truth from this poet and 'laugh at the devil!' The one great temptation at least which can alone make his doctrine and his example harmful his disciple will then and only then certainly avoid—the temptation to

place aught in his teacher's mouth which he has not said, to divide that which he requires to be left entire, to commit an abuse with a part of his truths, which the whole truth which he taught would prevent. For then we shall before everything learn that great art from him, which with good resolution is not so difficult to learn, and in the age in which we live is most salutary to learn, that art, namely, to *unlearn* all pretension, to lay aside the ruling passion for censuring God in his economy, not to despise and condemn the conditions of the world, but first of all to understand and to be acquainted with everything before passing sentence upon it, and thus to approach nearer to that impartiality and many-sidedness of judgment which we call first and last Shakespeare's most valuable quality. We need not repeat that, free from all sectarian spirit and all party feeling, he knew how to grasp and to honour in religion every conviction, in the state every form suitable to the age, among men every complete character true to itself, among the vocations of life every one which earnestly pursues its aim. He read in all ages, in all nations, in all relations of life, and, as it were, everything in his own tongue, and with appreciation for every kind of mould and nature. Human forms of character were familiar to him from the demi-god to the distorted original, all inclinations and vocations he seemed to know from his own experience, for he is whatever he chooses to be—a lion-hearted warrior and a child harmlessly at play, a genius and an idiot, equally acquainted with human strength and weakness, his head in the clouds and his feet upon the earth. It is for this reason that the most different men have delighted in him and been amazed at him, even those by nature the furthest removed from him, for everyone has found a side in him which speaks to himself; there seems indeed scarcely aught in human nature which does not find an analogy in him. In Germany the most sober-minded, such as Lichtenberg, and the most fantastic, such as the Romanticists, honour him equally; master-minds have despondingly admired him and novices have thought by imitation to surpass him. The sectarian spirit alone, which has strayed in one-sided directions, finds it hardest to agree with this man of many-sidedness; Platonic enthusiasm, sickly sensibility, the intellectual barrenness of a Voltaire, or the zeal of the religious—adversaries whom everyone would wish to possess. Otherwise this poet with his mighty power constrains all to be his adherents, for he is master of all our feeling, of the

emotions of our souls and our thoughts, and Goethe stood lost before this power and repose, and despairing before this versatility, in which Shakespeare 'had exhausted the whole human nature in all directions and in all its heights and depths,' and by this had discouraged his successor, even this great mind, from venturing competition with his 'unfathomable and unattainable excellencies.' And this same many-sidedness which his works declare must have been also the characteristic of Shakespeare himself. His portrait we have seen in Henry, who was equally qualified for enjoyment and activity, for jest and earnest, for war and peace, for vehemence and self-command, for folly and noble effort, adapted for every business and every society at the right time and in the right place, with kings a king, and with beggars their equal, familiar and proud, selfish and humble, in the variety of his being evading nothing but monotonous habit. Thus must Shakespeare have been. His favourite characters are those which unite the most contradictory qualities; a Hamlet with his rich endowments, a Posthumus so strong and tender, a Portia so pious and determined, so womanlike in her resignation, so active and so rigorous. And nothing seems more opposed to Shakespeare than the characters in whom any one-sidedness predominates; a cold calculating man like Iago, a sentimentalist like Cassio; and furthest from him lies perhaps that dogmatical Leontes, who is shut out from all truth by this one-sided narrow-mindedness. That which moreover takes from this many-sidedness of Shakespeare all idea of distraction and disunion, that which causes this oceanic mind, as Coleridge called him, ever to appear as one and the same element, that which makes him at once *πάνυ ὅλος*, which gives to his versatility at once the greatest compactness and entirety, is the property which we have often pointed out in him, according to which all his powers are so equally balanced, and are united in the most beautiful bond. As we found in an intellectual point of view that mind, judgment, fancy, contemplativeness, and practical understanding, the rarest wit which perceives analogy in the most remote object, and the greatest profoundness which pierces into the deepest ground of things were ever in unison, so is it also with his moral qualities in themselves and in their relation to the intellectual. His heart is as fresh as his head is healthy, his feelings as genuine and deep as his judgment is rich and tried, his inclination is in such harmony with his will, and his moral

efforts with his understanding, that as from an æsthetic point of view the ideal and beautiful in his art concur with the truth of his sensual and spiritual intention, so from an ethical point of view the good and the moral coincides with this same truth, so that ever in increased degree the same one, entire, normal being steps forth, whose peculiarity, as Hudson said, lies in his lack of peculiarities, in his generic properties, in the united perfection and in the equal balancing of his powers. For those who, among us, daily fall lamentable victims to one-sidedness, caprice, and narrow-mindedness, Shakespeare is a contrast of the highest value; to him it would have been utterly impossible to dissever human gifts and powers; in his art he knew no ideal that was irreconcilable with the actual, he scorned the beautiful which would divert from the good, and refused the truth which contradicted the beautiful and good. So that the most complete characteristic of the poet and of his poetry, of its many-sidedness and its unity, lies perhaps in the following verse, which is written in his 105th sonnet in a narrower application, but is capable of being understood in this wider one:—

> Fair, kind, and true, is all my argument,
> Fair, kind, and true, varying to other words;
> And in this change is my invention spent,
> Three themes in one, which wondrous scope affords.

In virtue of this rare union of that universality, which the Germans gladly boast of, with that totality which is the nature of the Englishman, Shakespeare stands as a link between the two nations, and is an equally great example and model for both, for each people from a different side, because he possesses that which on both sides expresses a want of the national nature. He impresses the Germans on the side of his totality, with which he casts all their own poetry into the shade. That which most invests Shakespeare's writings with this character of completeness is the natural inclination of the poet for the active side of life. It was this nature which fettered Bacon as well as Shakespeare to his age and nation; and it was this again which led them both to their activity in art and science, ay, placed before them practical aims and objects. The want of such conceivable aims, based on present national circumstances, has left the entire German poetry of the last century without a point of concentration; their poets found no settled political life and nationality, no prevailing tendency of taste

and style of poetry; each strove, therefore, to create and to form art and life according to his own ideal, since no complete and real national existence guided him in a definite course; the near result was lost in these wide-spreading efforts, and the greatest of their poets confessed that he had only known what he would and should do, but, divided and distracted, he had in nothing reached the true aim, and only in the works of other masters had found himself satisfied with *what they had done*. It is, therefore, easily accounted for that the nation, blessed indeed with so immense a mass of poetic productions, always felt a want unsatisfied, which it replaced by Shakespeare's works, and that it maintains the ambitious belief that the man shall yet stand forth in the history of poetry who shall be called the German Shakespeare. Let us, in the meanwhile, rejoice in unembittered joy in the English Shakespeare, even in the chance of no German succeeding him. Let us, even as a nation, learn modesty from him, not to grieve because a foreigner—he is certainly of our own stock—has won the prize from our own poetry; let us, on the other hand, contend with England for the glory of understanding him and thus naturalising him amongst us. We must acknowledge it with envy and jealousy: this poet is utterly free from all the hereditary faults of German poetry, and possesses at the same time virtues which German poetry has never possessed. How our poetry of the past century reeled to and fro between the extremes of a sickly sensibility and weakness and a strong-minded—as we then called it—power of genius (*Kraftgenialität*), and, as we ought to have called it, imaginary power and rude nature; of these strange deformities, from which our greatest masters were not wholly free, there is only one Shakespearian (and this moreover doubtful) youthful production. How our poetry alternated between a singular aspiring after originality on the one side and after a versatile imitation of the originals of all ages and nations on the other; our most favoured men have stood in relation to some period of civilisation, Klopstock to the Northern and Oriental, Wieland to the chivalric Byzantine, Goethe by turns to all; from leaps like these Shakespeare and the English stage were completely preserved by the national life around them. Our poetry, at the commencement of its regeneration in the past century and still more of late, has ever suffered from an inclination to all possible, natural, and forced extravagances; but Shakespeare knew nothing of these pas-

sionate paroxysms of which our poets feigned themselves the prey, nothing of the mental weaknesses which lead them to singularities of all kinds, to nonsense, to delirious excitement, nothing of the tormenting problems of civilisation and science, which have made our poetry so full of doctrines, abstractions, and practical tendencies, nothing of the pain of unsatisfied knowledge and unlimited sensibilities, which disturbed the most eminent minds among us, nothing of the irreconcilable enmity between the ideal and the actual life, which subverted our finest talents. He had to experience the struggle of sceptical years as much as any, his Hamlet is a warrant for this; but his healthful nature delighted not, as so many amongst us, in a voluntary defeat in the struggle; he was even in his youth a man, and his poetry has therefore nothing of the youthful character in it, which our own hardly laid aside in their best productions; he wrote for men, and to men only is he wholly intelligible. However much in the spirit of our German poetry he strove to free himself from the vain conventionalities of life, nowhere do we see him even tempted to reject the good with the bad, and, as is customary with us, to carry the experiments of an ideal witticism at random into actual life. However much he fashioned himself out of the limits of narrow-hearted nationality for universal humanity, contemptible would those cosmopolitan principles have been to him which the heads of our nation embraced. He had imbibed a political and patriotic spirit from history, the most valuable study for the poet, but one which ours, with the single exception of Schiller, left untouched; in its domain Shakespeare on the contrary did all that Bacon demanded even from the historian; he carries the mind into the past and makes it, as it were, old; he investigates the movements of the ages, the characters of the persons, the uncertainty of counsels, the course of actions, the soul of pretexts, the secrets of governments, and with candour and truth he renders them intelligible. If we compare Shakespeare with every single one of our mightiest German poets, we may maintain that the highest predicates pronounced upon them are just with reference to him, but their faults and one-sidedness he has avoided. As Klopstock first ennobled German poetry by his personal bearing, we may say the same indeed of Shakespeare with regard to dramatic poetry in England. Schiller denominated Klopstock the poet of dignity, for he raised the language of poetry, he insisted upon the closest

union between poetry and morality, and ever gave work to the mind; all this applies also to Shakespeare, but he never lost himself in Klopstock's religious extravagances, nor did he, like him, overstrain the mind with exertion, but he maintains it in constant freshness and power. Schiller denominated Wieland in contrast to Klopstock the poet of grace; Shakespeare is this as much as he is the poet of dignity. But never like Wieland does he weaken either the mind or the moral power. He has nowhere, as Wieland has not rarely done, covered the bare stump of vice with flowers, and thrown a veil of grace over the deformity of evil; wherever he has made the foul and the base open to all, he has not chosen attractive vessels, and when he has done so he has rendered them not easy to appropriate; his wantonness is clothed in such wit that the lascivious taste is not a match for it, and whoever seeks after such spoil in the works of Boccaccio or Wieland will never read Shakespeare's. Wieland is also among the poets of Germany the poet of a middle course, as we have declared Shakespeare to be. But Shakespeare never alternated like Wieland between enthusiasm and soberness, between naturalism and epicureanism, but he adhered firmly to the point of medium between these extremes; and he did not, like Wieland, consider all in man created as an instrument for pleasure, but as an instrument for activity. On this point Lessing's character approaches nearest to Shakespeare's, and on that also of his perfectly manly bearing; but Lessing was born for science and criticism, and he lacked the poetic ἀκμή, which was Shakespeare's richest possession. If we place Shakespeare by the side of Schiller and Goethe, we see easily how, with respect to mind and morals, he concentrated both natures in his own. Out of numberless points of comparison we will select only a few at random. With Goethe's comprehensive knowledge of human nature, Shakespeare united Schiller's unshaken reverence for mankind, which Goethe lost. Goethe lost it in individual intercourse, by a life distracted by manifold small activity, by his dislike and ignorance of the great world of politics and history; it was just in this world that Shakespeare moved and felt himself at ease, and maintained in it his reverence for human nature, because, even in Goethe's opinion, there are always the greatest objects at stake where mankind operates in combination. Shakespeare carries us, therefore, in the spirit of Schiller, ever upwards to the heights of active life, which Goethe always lost sight of the nearer he endeavoured to

lead us to the heights of civilisation. If from Goethe's many-sided pursuits and universal interest in all things a comprehensive *mind* was formed, from Shakespeare's interest in the active world, we may believe, a character was at the same time moulded. If Schiller's moral dignity elicited the esteem even of him who loves him less as a poet, and Goethe's elegance allured the love even of him who morally esteems him less, with Shakespeare we are in the happy position to be able always at once to esteem and love, ay, to be obliged to do so. Goethe himself has thus characterised the highest point of contrast between himself and Schiller—that Schiller was excited by the idea of freedom, but that he stood on the side of nature; in Shakespeare this contrast is not to be found. Compared with Goethe he gives us the impression of freedom, compared with Schiller that of nature, but also, on the other hand, compared even with Goethe he gives us the impression of nature, and with Schiller that of freedom; just as much is he a picture of natural perfections as of free mental effort, endowed by nature like Goethe, and requiting her favours by his own free endeavours like Schiller. Schiller denominated this to be the perfect work of civilisation —to place the *sensual power* in the richest contact with the world, and to increase its susceptibility to the highest degree, and to maintain the *mental power* independent and absolute, and to raise its activity and power of decision to the utmost: this is most peculiarly the characteristic of Shakespeare's mind. He has at once shown us, like Goethe, the compass of receptive nature, and, like Schiller, the power of the productive mind. He has neither neglected, as Schiller reproached Goethe with having done, to convert the gifts of nature into a true possession of the mind, nor has he, as Goethe blamed Schiller, endangered instinct by the activity of the mind. Nature had liberally endowed him, but he traded with the talent she had lent him, and the profit he was justified in calling his property; poetry, as Schiller pursued it, was to Goethe indeed too serious a business, but Shakespeare carried it on with more intense labour than either. No wonder, therefore, if Goethe stood satisfied before the performances of this master, as he did not before his own works, and if he looked up to him with reverence 'as a being of a higher kind;' a greater testimony has never been given to a genius than that the greatest poet who has followed Shakespeare during three centuries should have said of him that he feared to founder upon him. Thus it is then no wonder

that Shakespeare influenced so powerfully in Germany, that in spite of the interval of time he has worked more effectually than living poets, that among the unprejudiced he has overcome national jealousy, and that weighed even with those favourites of Germany, Goethe and Schiller, whose greatness and importance the nation truly has in nowise overlooked, he has stepped beyond them. In the very beginning of these notable influences upon Germany, Shakespeare appears again in one line with Homer. Both have first awakened the better day of German poetry, and have given the strongest and most lasting impulse to its greatest masters—Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller. Since this period Shakespeare's works have ever made greater conquests among the Teutonic races from Western America to Eastern Europe. For to these races he especially belongs in virtue of his general nature, which exhibits him never nationally as a hard Englishman, never religiously as the narrow follower of a confession, never, as regards his poetical taste, as a one-sided Saxon. Only in the Romanic nations, where the narrow national conventionalities of art, and yet far more Roman Catholicism and all that is connected with it, impede access to Shakespeare's works, is their circulation at a standstill. But this limitation to the Teutonic race is no sign of the limited views of the poet, or of too great a peculiarity in his ideal of art. The nature of times and nations is indeed of such a kind that they reject these reciprocal productions of literature; Homer also was unknown during 1,000 years of the middle ages, and Calderon and Dante never penetrated further towards the North than Shakespeare towards the South. But the Teutonic race is great enough in soul and body to dare independently to oppose its taste to that of the South and the ancients, and its civilisation has moreover so boundless a prospect of extension and duration that at all events no inferior lot of activity is measured out to our Shakespeare than to the greatest poets among the Greek and Latin races.

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